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CHRISTIAN COURIER

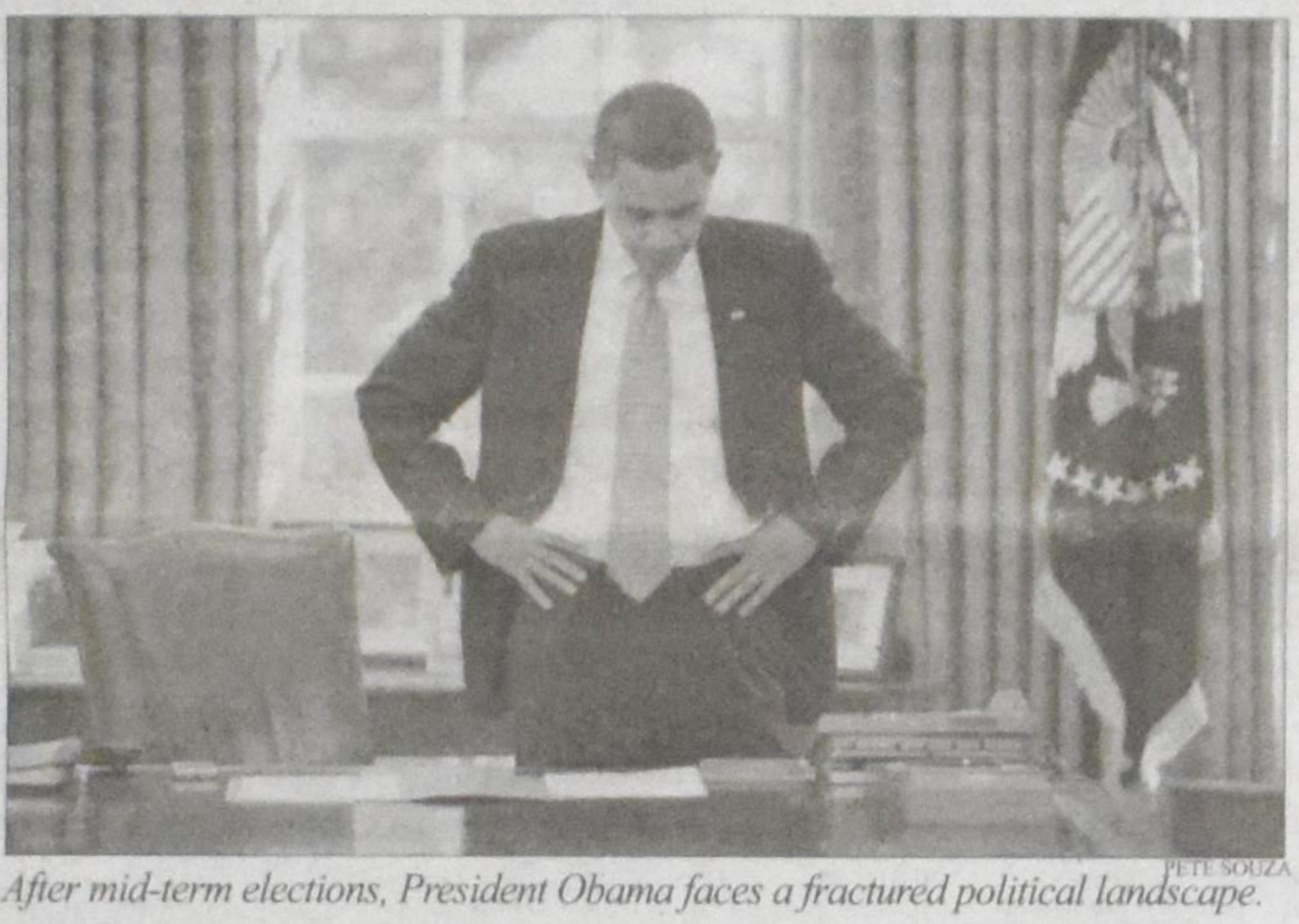
Tea Party revisted: Obama obtains a house divided

Mike Wevers

The Tea Party movement played a major role in the United States mid-term election, generally to its credit but with some negative consequences. While a significant majority of Americans spoke with one voice on November 2, the election results certainly delivered President Obama a Congress divided.

The Democratic Party surrendered control of the House of Representatives in Congress, but retained control of the Senate. Democrats quickly pointed out that mid-term results generally go against the sitting President's party; indeed, since the Civil War, only two first-term Presidents have picked up seats in their first mid-term election. President Obama noted that Reagan and Clinton were set back in their first mid-terms; but Obama's "shellacking," to use his own description, is of historic proportions, with a 60 Republican seat gain in the House of Representatives.

President Ronald Reagan's 1982 mid-term results saw his Republican Party lose 27 House of Representative seats, but the Democrats went into that election already having a 50-seat majority. With no change in the Senate, and the Republicans retaining their majority in the Senate, the 1982 mid-term election resulted in no real power change in Congress.



PETE SOUZA

After mid-term elections, President Obama faces a fractured political landscape.

President Obama also invoked Clinton's 1994 setback. In some respects, President Clinton's repudiation was more dramatic because the Democrats lost control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives (the Newt Gingrich "Contract with America," when Republicans gained 54 seats in the House). It gave the Democratic President no choice but to work with an opposition Congress. Notwithstanding President Clinton's commitment to cooperate, the budget negotiations between the President and Congress broke down that very next year, with the U.S. government actually shutting down services, including some Washington monuments to visitors at the end of the calendar year. The Tea Party movement might want to pay attention to this debacle. Pundits believe President Clinton won the budget battle, showing the Republican leadership to be petty. This paved his way to re-election in 1996.

A Republican resurgence

There is little argument that the Tea Party movement, which still has no one overarching representative or common leadership, led the massive change in the House of Representatives. Its unorganized structure results in its energy being expressed at the local district level. The Republican Party tried to harness this energy using its "Fire Pelosi" (outgoing Democrat Speaker of the House) national campaign bus. The bus was riding on the catch phrase used by Tea Party darling Sarah Palin, whose support to some candidates helped their victory.

See **House divided** *on page 2*

Politics and faith

In U.S. politics, the openness with which candidates publicly express their faith is startling. When almost every candidate, winning or losing, concludes their election night speech with "God Bless America" – emphasized – you certainly do get the sense it is very sincere.

In September of this year, while campaigning, President Obama, without equivocation, stated he is a Christian by choice (unfortunately many still don't trust him on this). Marco Rubio, Senator-elect in Florida, thanked God strongly as his first statement in his acceptance speech before all others (most thanked their families first). This kind of candor is rarely seen north of the border. Why are Canadian politicians so closeted about their faith?

Heads in the sand:

Canadians still spending in pre-recession mode

Ian Cubitt

TORONTO, Ont. – During the credit crisis and economic contraction of 2008-2009 the media and government leaders intentionally avoided using the D-words: deflation, double-dip recession and depression. Most economists predicted a "soft landing" where the economy would keep growing slowly and avoid recession. Now that the stock markets have recovered a significant amount of the losses from the past three years, many economists say we have averted a depression and the likelihood of the economy dipping back into recession is remote. Despite these heart-warming reassurances from authorities who predicted no recession in 2008-2009, three developments in late October suggest another period of economic turbulence is around the corner.

Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of Canada, warns that the economy is still fragile.

First, the Bank of Canada issued warnings about the fragility of the Canadian economy and gave its assessment that the Canadian economy has slowed dramatically in the second half of 2010. Second, the U.S. Federal Reserve formally announced that it is ready to start another round of massive economic stimulus. Third, the British government announced that 500,000 government employees will be laid off as part of the biggest spending cuts since World War II.

The Bank of Canada warnings highlight that complacency is rampant in Canadian households. So far Canada has been affected less

See **Spending** *on page 2*

News

House divided *continued*

However, that effectiveness at the local level may have been the problem at the state level. The Tea Party movement was not able to put together a consistent front on a state-wide basis. No doubt the Democratic Party end-game election strategy had recognized that it would probably lose control of the House of Representatives, so it went all out to retain the Senate. Those witnessing border state television programming were able to

Despite using up vast resources during the campaign, Carly Fiorina lost her race.

watch the continued penchant for attack ads in American politics, financed by what seems unlimited campaign spending. However, political observers may be pleased to see that vast resources do not ensure victory. Reportedly, two Senate Republican candidates, former Hewlett-Packard Co. CEO Carly Fiorina and former World Wrestling Entertainment CEO Linda McMahon, spent tens of millions of dollars of their personal wealth in losing causes in California and Connecticut. The Republicans also lost a Senate race squeaker in Washington State.

These Democrat Senate wins (holds, really) are indicative of where Democratic "Blue" maintained most of its strength: in north-east and west coast states. Most of the rest of the country is a "Red" Republican swath. Had the Republicans won these, together with one or two other Senate races, they would have taken control of all of Congress, further complicating President Obama's ability to control his own agenda.

'It's the economy, stupid'

In election day results and voter exit poll findings by CNN, it was remarkable how low the Obama health care issue rated amongst voters. This confirmed the network's earlier opinion polls, where only eight percent of people ranked Obamacare as their number one issue. At 52 percent, the number one issue by far is the American economy. Surprisingly no commentators I heard that day invoked the infamous campaign strategy of Bill Clinton in 1990. The then President Bush's re-election campaign was riding smoothly on the coat-tails of the first, and successful, Gulf War campaign. Bill Clinton's supporters were able to derail the Republican campaign through the taunting refrain of "it's the economy, stupid," focussing on rising unemployment and recession concerns. As a result, the first President Bush joined President Jimmy Carter, as the most recent presidents failing to secure a second term.

With the American economy in a quagmire, we should not be surprised that the sitting President faired poorly. Unemployment is reaching ten percent, which may be understated as people give up the job search. Many Americans have lost or will be losing their homes as the foreclosure crisis continues unabated. As many as one in four US homeowners owe more to the bank than their homes are worth.

Government spending or tax cuts?

President Obama said his stimulus program has stopped the downward economic spiral, but this week he agreed that the economy is still at bottom, and worse, has stalled. More stimulus spending to create jobs will increase the deficit and build more debt. The new Republican leadership is looking for tax cuts to allow businesses and individuals to spend more, but if tax cuts are not matched by reduced spending, more debt results. Both strategies hope that new spending will create enough future economic expansion and government revenue to offset the interim increase in debt.

In fact, an immediate decision has to be made on George W. Bush-era tax cuts which are scheduled to expire December 31 this year. President Obama had indicated an openness to continue the cuts for middle class taxpayers (below an income of $250,000). Republicans would prefer to keep them for all.

Friendly summits

Sensing a need to reach consensus, President Obama agreed at his press conference, with some comic relief, to have a "Slurpee Summit" with the Republican leadership, to

AP PHOTO/CHARLES DHARAPAK

President Obama accepts a document of Republican solutions from John Boehner.

explore economic recovery solutions. The likely Republican Speaker of the House, John Boehner, accepted the invitation, but possibly over a glass of wine instead (Mr. Boehner grew up in a family of 12 siblings working in their father's bar in Ohio).

The need for consensus building did not stop with the party leadership. Republican Senator-elect Mark Kirk, who barely won Obama's vacated Illinois Senate seat, agreed to sit down over a beer with the defeated Democrat candidate to discuss common ground. Although the Tea Party movement has apparently led to a more fractured political landscape in the United States, individual politicians have a sense that in order to get things done, especially on the economy, cooperation will be required. A chastened President Obama may yet get his promised reduction in partisanship, but he has paid a heavy price to get there.

Mike Wevers, retired from the Alberta Government as an Assistant Deputy Minister, is an independent consultant. He lives in Edmonton.

Spending *continued*

by the economic struggles than many other economies. However, Canadians continue to borrow as if the "normal" economic conditions of the past few decades will continue in the future, including rising wages, relatively stable employment and rising real estate prices. The Bank of Canada reports that 60 percent of Canadians are living paycheque-to-paycheque, to the point where they would experience significant financial strain if their income was delayed by one week.

If Canadians were serious about tackling their personal debt, we would be seeing a decrease in the consumer debt/income ratio. Massive consumer debt is not a sign of a healthy economy. The primary way that debt can be repaid is for assets to be liquidated or income diverted from consumption. With the Bank of Canada forecasting dramatic reduction in economic growth in the final months of 2010 and with unemployment staying stubbornly high, repaying debt will continue to be a challenge.

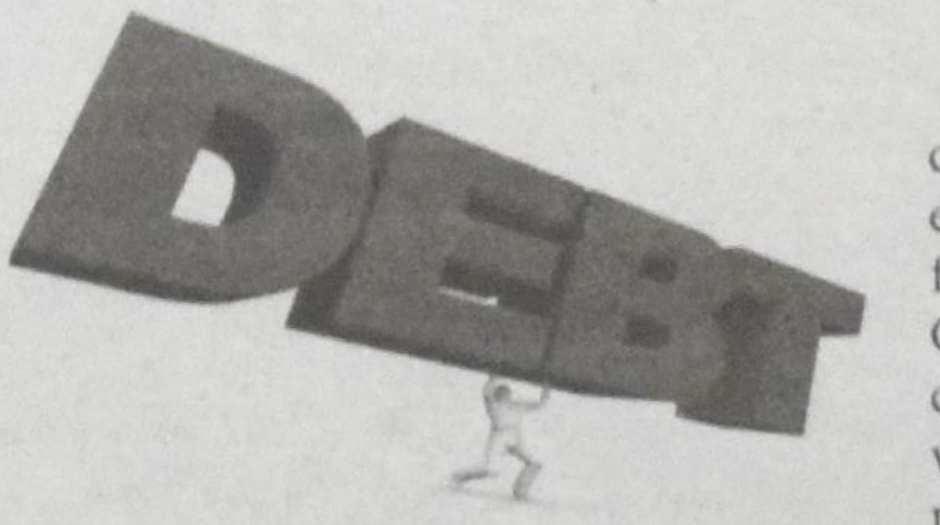
Economic reaction plans

The U.S. Federal Reserve's announcement of more economic stimulus is an implicit acknowledgement that the trillions of dollars that it already threw at the US economy in the past two years (in addition to interest rates near zero percent) has failed to revive the U.S. economy. Despite the trillions of dollars injected in the monetary system, the total credit market in the U.S. shrank by $296 billion between September 2008 and June 2010, after 63 consecutive years of credit growth in the US.

The British budget cuts are a confirmation that the "buy now, pay later" approach eventually backfires. The Biblical principle that the borrower is the lender's slave is once again reinforced. In a world where government stimulus packages have become the standard medicine to prevent economic collapse, the budget cuts in Britain show that at some point government spending will be cut back and the economic contraction that government spending was intended to prevent could easily occur.

These recent developments carry a number of useful lessons. First, individuals, governments and businesses all come to a point where spending more than you earn has to stop. Solving debt problems by borrowing more money is a trick that even governments are starting to have trouble performing.

Second, deflation is a bigger threat than inflation. The money supply in major economies like the U.S. continues to contract despite super-low interest rates and record



amounts of monetary stimulus. The Canadian government's record budget deficit and the U.S. Federal Reserve's multi-trillion dollar stimulus packages are inflationary, but the result in the economy and financial markets has been the opposite – a deflationary credit contraction.

Third, as the credit contraction accelerates and the supply of money in the economy gets smaller the factors that generated so much wealth over the past 75 years will be reversed. The inflation-fueled, buy-and-hold, stocks-are-awesome era since the Great Depression occurred during a period of rapidly expanding credit and debt. My parents' and grandparents' generations grew wealth by investing in things that went up in value during credit expansion. My great-grandparents' generation got crushed by deflation in the Great Depression when the same techniques resulted in substantial losses.

Evaluating what credit contraction could do to the resources we have been entrusted with is an essential requirement for stewardship in an over-indebted world. God's rule over all of life means that he cares about how we manage not only what we donate to church and charity, but also the remaining assets that are still in our control. Deciding how to be a responsible steward of God's resources always involves evaluating the probabilities of what may happen in the future.

Normal investment allocation and diversification strategies often don't work as expected during periods of deflation since stocks, corporate/municipal bonds, real estate, commodities and precious metals often lose value at the same time during deflation. Having a higher than normal allocation of cash and short-term federal government bonds will likely help to preserve financial wealth as deflation continues.

Ian Cubitt (iancubitt@gmail.com) is a Chartered Accountant and a tax manager with BDO Canada LLP in Mount Forest, Ontario. He has co-founded three businesses and is fascinated by how emotions and social mood impact financial markets.

News

Teaching from faith and respecting creation

From the Lab
Rudy Eikelboom

For one weekend every October, Ontario public universities (those funded directly by the government) take over the Metro Toronto Convention Centre for the Ontario Universities' Fair. This fall over 130,000 people attended. High school students and parents had an opportunity to talk with faculty and staff of all the universities in one place to help them choose a university. I spent a Saturday at Laurier's large booth, talking about the psychology program at Laurier. I came home hoarse. What a wonderful way to meet potential students and their parents and to find out what university-related issues are important to them. (If you have a student who is university-bound and you live in southern Ontario, you might flag this event for future years.)

One young woman and her mother came back to talk to me a second time. They had noticed my Dutch name and wondered if I was connected to the Christian Reformed Church. When I said I was, they asked if I knew about Redeemer University College and how it compared to a public university. Since Janny, my wife, works at Redeemer, I said that I knew it well and that they had a small but very good psychology faculty (and, as far as I can tell, a good faculty in other disciplines, too). The range of psychology material covered in detail at Laurier (with 33 psychology professors) would be broader than at Redeemer (with four psych profs), but the quality of instruction would certainly be comparable. Either institution would be a good choice.

Defining academic freedom

Then they asked a question that surprised me; they had heard that at a public university I was not allowed to teach out of my Christian faith. I told them that this was definitely not true, that one of the foundations of modern universities is precisely the academic freedom to teach and work from different perspectives and worldviews. The protection of academic positions provided by the tenure process gives professors the opportunity to promote alternate, minority, even unpopular views. I suspect, though I am not sure about percentages, that at public universities professors of Christian conviction may be in the minority, but my being in the minority does not limit my academic freedom. They were glad to hear this, but I suspect it made their university choice more difficult.

The question also made me wonder what we mean by teaching out of one's Christian faith in the sciences (the humanities may be somewhat different). It does *not* mean that I can give solely theological or biblical reasons for scientific or social phenomena. For example, it would not be acceptable for me, or students, in a psychology class or research paper to state that family violence happens because, according to Scripture, humans are sinful from birth. The latter statement is certainly true, and the consequences of our sinfulness are evident all around us, but respect for the place of science requires that I work with the tools that are appropriate to the domain. Scientific knowledge of God's creation has progressed immensely in the last 100 years, and this knowledge has a legitimate place in our study of God's creation. Science has rules, limits, and standards that are part of its very nature and must be respected. Although I am no philosopher, I believe that this may be an aspect of the Dooyeweerdian notion of sphere sovereignty.

In a psychology class it is appropriate for me, or students, to look at what motivates behaviour that we find repulsive. I can speak about what factors lead to family violence: Is it a function of what parents experienced as children? Does alcohol consumption play a role? How do TV shows (the Super Bowl, for example) factor into spousal abuse? Does religious belief reduce family violence? This work leads to a better understanding of the psychological and sociological factors involved in behaviours that Christians call sinful. It may also lead to programs to prevent or reduce family violence. My faith is not excluded in these discussions, but it does not trump other considerations.

When Christian students – for that matter, all students – come to university, one of the things they have to learn is the appropriate procedures and limits for specific subjects. This learning may suggest different and more complex understandings of our faith. Our challenge as Christians, and my ongoing struggle, is to live our faith in a way that respects both general and special revelation.

Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) is associate professor of psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario

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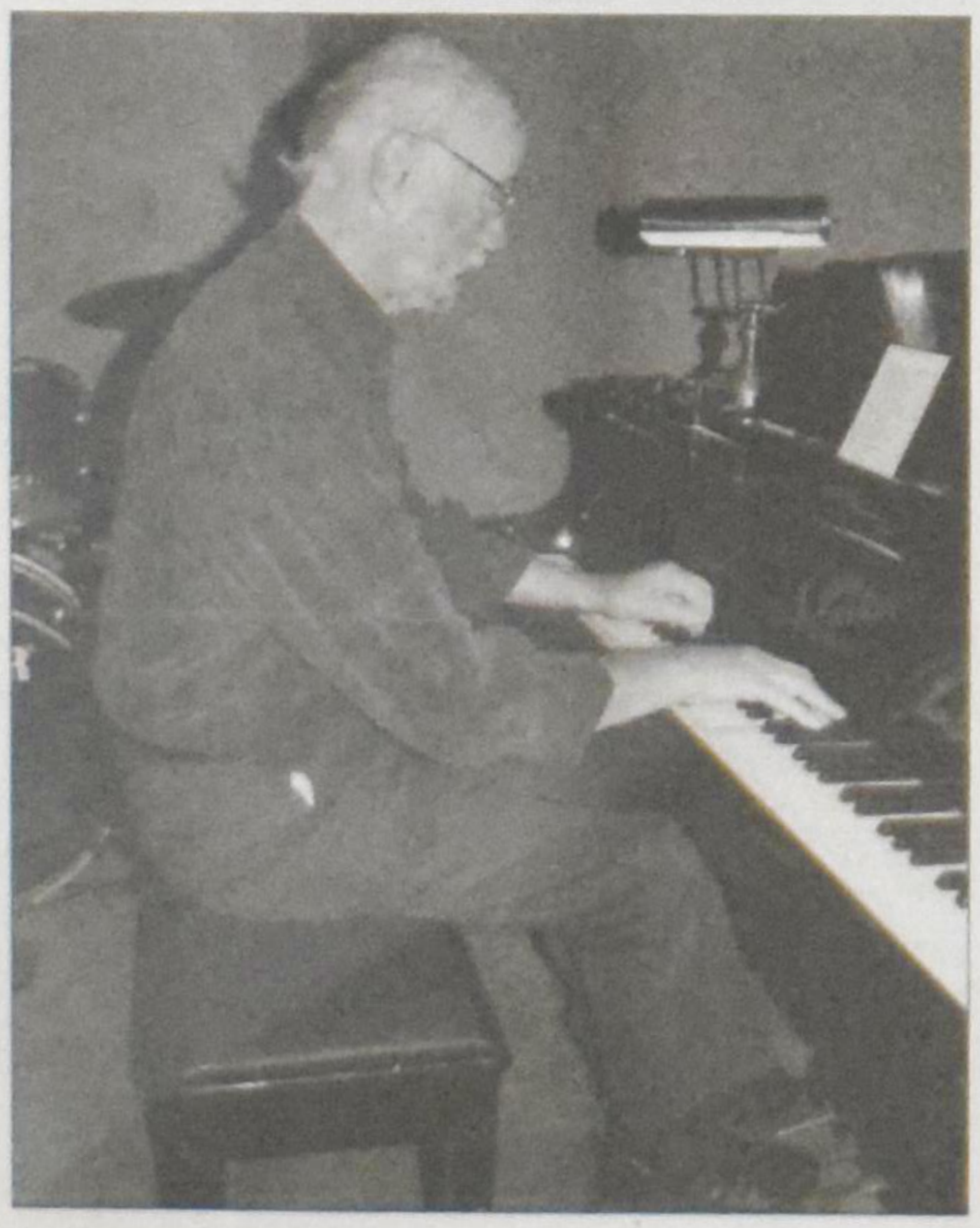
Valley old-timers gather for Dutch sing-song



Bart van der Kamp

DELTA, B.C. – The Saturday evening before Halloween saw a gathering at Ladner CRC from around the Fraser Valley. The purpose: an evening of Dutch songs organized as a CRWRC fundraiser by Frank DeVries (the Frank of PsH 518) with the help of pastor Henry Jonker. With Frank leading at the piano and over a hundred enthusiastic voices, the auditorium rang out with both sacred and secular Dutch songs.

Most of us in attendance came to Canada as teenagers or young adults in the late 40's and early 50's, and some of us had to dig deep to recover the tunes of such old favourites as *Heer ik hoor van rijke zegen* and *In een blauw geruite kiel*. Nevertheless this was singing "uit volle borst," requiring the occasional peppermint to keep the throat lubricated. The evening ended appropriately with *k Wil U, o God, mijn dank betalen* and *Ere zij God*. Coffee afterwards saw many re-acquaintances, and a general sentiment that this ought to happen more often.

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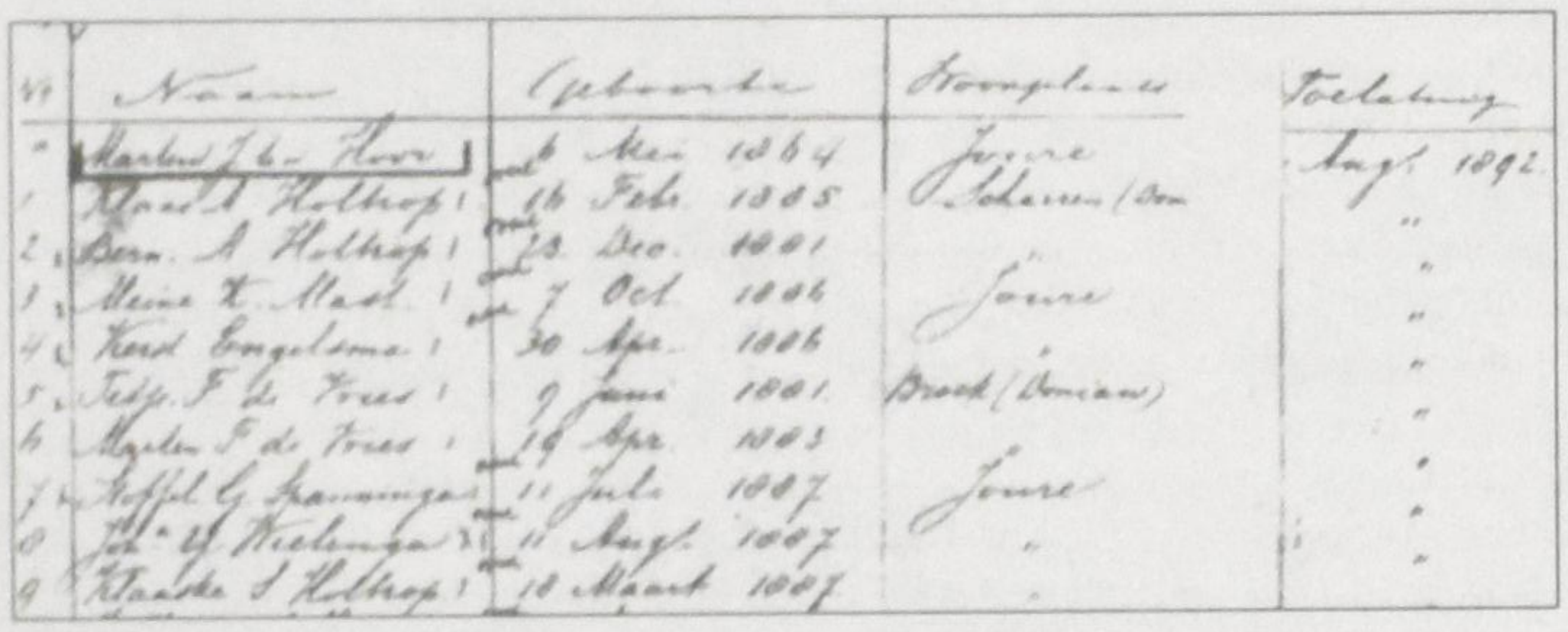
Editorials

Legacy of hope

Bert Witvoet

I have a book in my library that shows a photocopy of the first pupil register of the Christian elementary school of my birthplace, Joure, in the Netherlands. The register dates back to 1892. On that first page of that first register I see my grandmother's name, with her date of birth – Tetje F. de Vries. She was 11 years old in 1892 and the fifth child to be registered on August 1, the first day of school. Right underneath her name is the name of her younger brother Marten de Vries. My great-grandparents made sure she and her younger brother were admitted as soon as the school had opened.



My grandparents, in turn, registered my mother in the same school in 1914, and my own parents registered me in that school in 1940, a few months after a battalion of German soldiers occupied our town. Even World War II could not prevent my parents from sending their children to a Christian school. Later, after we immigrated to Canada, my wife and I registered our children in the Christian schools of Toronto and St. Catharines. Later again, our son and daughter-in-law in Calgary have registered their children in the Christian School of Calgary. We are talking five generations of the blessing of Christian education in our family.

Clinging to hope

Talk about having been woven into a fabric of faithfulness! But whose faithfulness are we considering here? Ours? Not according to Hebrews 10:23, where the author urges Jewish Christians "to hold unswervingly to the hope we profess." Why should these Jews hold unswervingly to the hope they profess? Because, writes the author, "he who promised is faithful." "He who promised" – that refers to God who, through his own steadfast faithfulness, keeps his promise of blessing. So let's put it this way, my ancestors, my wife and I, and our son and daughter-in-law have held and are holding unswervingly to the hope we profess when it comes to Christian education, because God has been and is faithful to us. It's *his* faithfulness we are talking about. We are merely hope-clingers.

When I look at that simple register from 1892, I see God's covenantal faithfulness symbolized in my grandmother's name written in elegant handwriting that shows discipline and purpose. Our grandchildren in Calgary in the year 2010 are the beneficiaries of my great-grandparent's clinging to hope in the Netherlands on August 1, 1892. Unfortunately, I don't have this kind of hard evidence from my wife's side of the family, but I know the story there is the same. Her ancestors also embraced God's promises made at the baptism of their children.

Threats to the system

Like the converted Jews of the first century after Christ, we 21st-century Christians are surrounded by all kinds of voices that urge us to let go of Christian education for all kinds of plausible reasons. There are many promises floating around that do not build Christian schools. I will not dampen your enthusiasm by listing all the reasons given for not sending a child to a Christian school.

I will follow the author of Hebrews by taking the positive route. I will tell you to encourage each other, and all the more so as you see the Day approaching. Not only must we hold on to God's promises by reaching up, but we must also hold on to each other by reaching sideways. We must give new courage to each other.

The whole picture in Hebrews assumes that Christians face struggles and difficulties. Our Christian schools are no different.

It's my opinion that Christian schools in the West today suffer more from a society and community wallowing in prosperity than from a society and community experiencing poverty. When my grandmother was enrolled, her parents were eking out a living on a small farm with little opportunity for consumerism. My wife, our daughter, and I visited that farm a few years ago, and we saw the stable. It could not have held more than 10 cows. The Christian schools were built by thousands of people like them without government support. The Christian schools in the Netherlands have been fully funded by the government for over 100 years now, but are struggling to maintain their Christian character. In North America it's not government funding (nor the lack of it, I would add) that threatens our existence, but the demands of a media- and consumption-saturated society, and the lack of communal support for Body-of-Christ schools that steadfastly and unswervingly cling to the hope we profess.

Hebrews 6:19 talks about this hope as "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." Just as an anchor keeps a ship from smashing onto the rocky shore in times of stormy weather by grabbing onto the bottom of the ocean, so our ship of Christian education will not be destroyed by humanistic waves, dualistic winds and economic storms if we lower that anchor of hope, and latch onto the floor of God's promises.

Bert Witvoet is a Contributing Editor for CC and lives with his wife Alice in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to engage creatively in critical Christian journalism, connecting Christians with a network of culturally savvy partners in faith for the purpose of inspiring all to participate in God's renewing work within his fallen creation.

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The paper is published the second & fourth Mondays of the month.

Christian Courier
5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838
Web site: www.christiancourier.ca

Publications Mail Registration No. 09375

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities. Canada

Empty buckets, dry kindling, or fiery flames?

Sam Gutierrez

I walked into the campus library the other day where someone had written a quote on a dry erase board. It was by William Butler Yeats: "*Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire.*" As I waited at the circulation desk, I thought about how the quote reminded me of a book I had recently read by James K. Smith called "Desiring the Kingdom." In it, he makes the case that human beings at their fundamental core are not containers for belief, but lovers who desire. He writes: "To be human is to be such a lover – a creature whose orientation and form of life is most primordially shaped by what one loves as ultimate…." (51)

It seemed to me that Yeats and Smith had something in common: they both believed that human beings are not just empty vessels waiting to be filled with ideas and belief systems. According to Yeats, the imagery shifts from an empty bucket waiting to be filled to dry kindling waiting for an educational "spark." Smith, on the other hand, believes that human beings at their fundamental core are neither buckets, nor kindling, but lovers. In other words, the fire is already burning. The goal of education then is not to light a fire, but to shape the flame.

Shaping our vision

Pondering all of this as I left the library and headed towards the university center, I remembered reading that Smith believed that humans beings engage in communal practices and habits of the heart that end up shaping their love or "aiming" it towards certain ends. He pointed out that universities are not neutral institutions but engage in practices that intend to direct our love (flame) towards certain ends. Like the Church, the university is a love-shaping place. Through its rhythms, language, curriculum, goals, and strategic plans, the university inevitably shapes a person towards a particular vision of "the good life." Smith points out that "the good life" that many universities prepare students for is one of "careerism" that promises material goods and freedom from economic restraint.

For the past few weeks, I've been thinking about Smith, his book, the university, the Church and the quote by Yeats. I don't think I've come to any conclusions, but two key questions keep surfacing for me: What is the goal of education? Who are human beings at their fundamental core? Are human beings empty buckets waiting to be filled with content? Or, as Yeats suggests, dry kindling waiting for a spark? Or maybe, as Smith writes, we are more like lively flames that need shaping and tending?

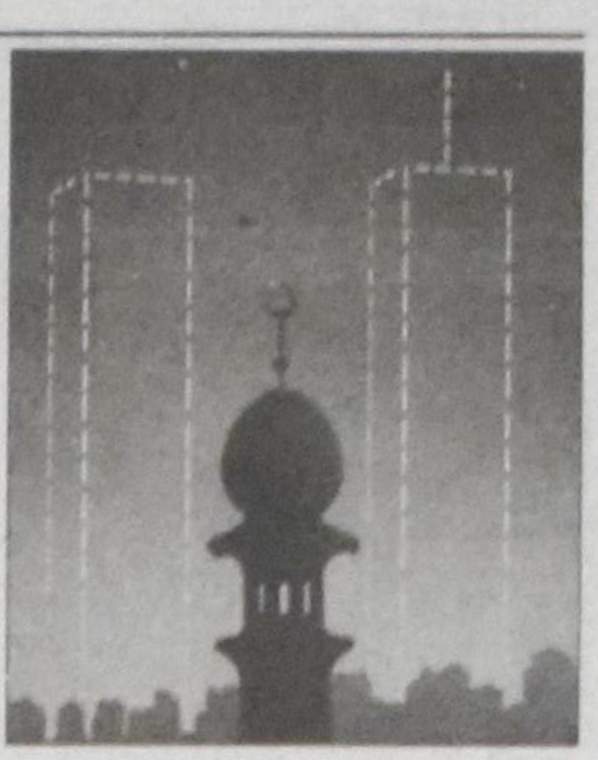
Whether Yeats or Smith is right is up for debate. What is true for both, however, is the nature of fire. Even the smallest fire, if not cared for properly, can cause a lot of damage. But with the right containment, fuel, tending and nurturing, that same small flame can provide endless warmth and much needed light.

Sam Gutierrez (samg1977@gmail.com) is a Christian Reformed Campus Minister, whose ministry is supported by British Columbia South East Classis in partnership with the Well Church in Kelowna, B.C.

What do you remember?

Christian Courier celebrates its 65th anniversary this year. We would love to hear from you with stories about how long you've read this paper, how it has influenced your lives or what memories you have connected with it. Select letters will be included in our anniversary issue this December. Please email editor@christiancourier.ca or send to 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1 before December 13.

Letters



Public perception, spiritual warfare and the Ground-Zero mosque

Dear Harry,

In your column "Why the Ground-Zero mosque should not be built" (*CC* Oct. 11), there is little that I dispute. In fact, it makes a lot of sense. And yet, at some fundamental level, I actually disagree with its intent. I'm writing this open letter in the hope that I can clarify my thoughts for myself and inspire you to respond.

Let me get at my discomfort with your thesis. I think it has to do with the level at which your argument operates. As far as I can discern, your reasoning takes place at the level of public perceptions.

How others perceive it

You're not the only one. Politicians do it all the time. Iman Rauf does, too. He says that "if he would concede and not build that mosque at that location, it would send a message to the Muslim world that America is being anti-Muslim." So the imam operates at the level of public perception, which often lends itself to exaggeration.

You fall in line with that when you write: "It is safe to assume that all radical Islamists would view a Ground-Zero mosque as a symbol of Islamic supremacy and triumphalism." Your statement also operates at the level of public perception. Neither one of these two statements get at the root of the issue – whether it is wrong to build the Ground-Zero mosque.

You argue that mosques are places where many radicals, including the 9/11 perpetrators, are indoctrinated into a violent strain of Islam, and *that*, you say, is the most compelling reason why 70 percent of Americans oppose the building project. From this unfair generalization I must conclude that, if this indoctrination is the most compelling reason to oppose the building of the Ground-Zero mosque, then it should be the most compelling reason to oppose the building of all mosques. The specific place has nothing to do with that reason, unless, again, you rely on the argument of public perception.

The irony in all this is that, had no one objected to the building of that mosque, and had no one declared several blocks around Ground-Zero "sacred," the actual building of it would not have symbolized victory for Muslims worldwide.

Let's agree with you that Imam Rauf is not sincere in his "peace-loving" talk and that he empathizes with the cause of terrorism. Is that a good reason for banning the building of this mosque?

A more radical approach

But I want to address this question at a deeper level, not on the level of public perception and symbolism. I want to go to the level of the battle of the spirits. This, after all, is the battle we Christians are called to fight. On that level, we are at war with Islam, not just radical Islam but *all* of Islam. Islam is a false religion, which wants to capture the souls of men and women (and by "souls" I mean their total existence). Christ, on the other hand, is also engaged in that spiritual battle, and we know that he wins. It's written all over the Book of Revelation: "Christ wins!"

We, in the meantime, have to live out of that victory and wield the powerful yet non-material weapons prescribed in Ephesians 6: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the sandals of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, none of which are aimed at preventing the building of a mosque. This battle is not against flesh and blood, not against Muslims or mosques, but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil. (The state, of course, has the right to wield material weapons in fighting proven terrorism. But that's not what is at stake here.)

There are many forces of evil at work in our world, including secularism, atheism and, yes, Islam. Nevertheless, we engage these authorities with great hope, not by taking away their right to exist and establish themselves, but by speaking and living the gospel of peace.

Bert Witvoet
(bert.witvoet@sympatico.ca)
St. Catharines, Ontario

Dear Bert,

I welcome a public exchange about the controversial topic of a mosque near Ground Zero. You write that my argument takes place at the level of public perception, which you think "often lends itself to exaggeration," and, in my case, to "unfair generalization." The dictionary tells me that perception can mean understanding the truth about something. So perception is not necessarily wrong or merely imaginary. It all depends what criterion one uses.

Another problem with the term public perception is its ambiguity. Who is the public? How do we know its perception?

You claim that I write at the level of public perception, and, therefore, I do the same thing as Imam Rauf. I do not see the logic of that position, because I reason from a different, even radically opposed, worldview.

A lot of baggage

You ask whether, even if Rauf were a hypocrite and supporter of terrorism, would that be sufficient reason to ban the building of this mosque? Rauf is not an isolated individual but represents a 1400-year religion, the current violent branch of which has declared war on the West and is determined to use every means, including deception and violence, to spread its tentacles all over the world. In other words, Rauf comes with a lot of baggage. He has said that sharia law is compatible with American democracy. But Islamic law presupposes the merging of state and mosque, which is always accompanied by the destruction of freedom and the failure to develop a healthy economy and vibrant culture.

The traumatic impact of 9/11 on the American psyche should convince all Muslims to back off in the face of overwhelming opposition to their mosque. The fact that they do not, and that Rauf had the gall to blame America itself for this attack, confirms that these Muslims have no respect or appreciation for America. They show no sense of responsibility for what happened in the name of their religion. They seem to like rubbing salt in America's gaping wound.

Spiritual warfare

I think that the most important part of your letter is subtitled "A more radical approach." You want to talk about the battle of the spirits in which we are involved. You write that here "we are at war with Islam, not just radical Islam but all of Islam. Islam is a false religion…." I assume that here you refer to spiritual warfare.

I totally agree, and I admire your courage to write this publicly and clearly. Many, including Christians, do not do so because they are afraid or confused. But then you write that we engage the evil forces, not by taking away their right to exist and establish themselves, but by speaking and living the gospel of peace.

Islam is complex and there are different kinds of Muslim believers. Some (including Tarek Fatah and Salim Mansur – and in the U.S., Zuhdi Jasser) are moderate and oppose the radicals in their midst. They are our friends and neighbours. But they are the exception; most moderate Muslims prefer to remain silent.

I agree that we should speak and live the gospel of peace in our interpersonal relations. But in a situation where a violent, hate-filled branch of Islam has declared war on us, the situation changes. Here the task of the state is very different from that of the church; the principle of sphere sovereignty applies. I do not believe that Jesus' teaching about turning the other cheek and loving our enemies means that we should be pacifists.

Hirsi Ali is right when she urges Christians to become much more assertive in meeting Islam at the level of faith and ideas. That begins with a firm understanding of our own faith, and then getting to know the truth about Islam. We have our work cut out for us on both counts. Are we up to that task?

Harry Antonides
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two yrs. (48 issues)	$90.00	

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(ISSN 1192-3415) Published second and fourth Mondays of the month.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838
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PRINTED IN CANADA

News

Iraqi Christians 'terrified'; many prepare to leave country

BAGHDAD, Iraq (CatholicCulture) – The massacre at the Syrian Catholic cathedral in Baghdad that killed 58 and wounded 70 has left Iraqi Christians "terrified and in shock," according to the Redemptorist superior in Iraq.

"We are living something that is really terrible," Father Vincent van Vossel told the Fides news agency. "There had never been a massacre of such magnitude" – and it happened in a church during the celebration of Communion. Van Vossel continued, "I have visited the church and listened to the testimonies of the faithful in shock. The terrorists mercilessly killed women and children. The community is traumatized. The church looked like a cemetery."

"Yesterday a number of attacks hit Baghdad and Shiite areas, which means that not only Christians are under attack, but the whole area is flooded by terrorism," added Father van Vossel, who has lived in Iraq for four decades. "Many Christian families are organizing themselves to leave the country. The excruciating dilemma is whether to flee in search of a better future, or stay, risking their lives."

Van Vossel noted that the November 2 funeral of the massacre victims "was attended by many Muslim leaders who asked the government to defend Christians. We hope that, after yet another massacre, civil authorities listen to the cry of Christians in Iraq and place an end to their suffering."

In an interview with the AsiaNews service, Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk said that government officials have an obligation to provide security for Christians, especially at churches on Sunday. Muslim leaders, he added, have a moral duty to denounce the terrorist attacks on Christians.

A young Iraqi Chrisitian is seeking sanctuary in Syria after fleeing his hometown of Mosul with his family.

CRC: Studies on baptism, Lord's Supper ready for church members' review

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich./BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – Christian Reformed Church in North America leaders announced earlier this month that three significant synodical reports are now complete. Pastors, church councils and other church members (and anyone else) may read the reports on the denominational website at <www.crcna.org> and the reports can be downloaded. They will also be printed in the Agenda for Synod 2011 and will be discussed by the delegates at synod next June, says Rev. Gerard L. Dykstra, executive director of the CRCNA.

Synod 2009 appointed three committees whose reports are available.

The study reports were produced by three committees appointed by Synod 2009. The following is an overview of what they contain.

The Faith Formation Committee is recommending that there be changes to the Church Order that will guide members' understanding and use of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Among those word changes:

"Baptized members shall be encouraged to make a public profession of faith with the use of a prescribed form in a public worship service. All baptized members who come with age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to the Lord's Supper and called to obey the scriptural commands about participation in an age- and ability-appropriate way under the supervision of the elders."

"Each congregation shall determine the appropriate age at which a confessing member shall receive such privileges and responsibilities."

A revised version of the "Form of Subscription for Officebearers" (which all officebearers must sign) is also being proposed. The first revised paragraph reads:

"We, the undersigned, believe the inspired Word of God as received in the Old and New Testaments of Holy Scripture, which proclaims the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ and the reconciliation of all things in him. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, we submit to it in all matters of life and faith."

A third document deals with a joint CRC/Reformed Church in America (RCA) revision of the historic Reformed confessions, the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Canons of Dort*. There was seen to be a need for this during the planning for a bi-denominational hymnal (which is ongoing). That's because the CRC and RCA have differing versions of the confessions.

The study report on this issue says, "The committee decided that it would not undertake a totally new translation but [would] work from the present translations in the two denominations. However, where there were discrepancies, the committee consulted the original languages to resolve textual differences." In addition, there were some places in which it was judged that the translation needed improvement. This, also, was done by looking back to the original-language documents.

Watch out for deadlines

Church councils wishing to respond to the reports and have their responses considered by Synod 2011 may do so by submitting an overture or communication to synod. (These need to be processed through local church councils and then by whichever classis a congregation belongs to. Approved overtures should be submitted to the Synodical Services office by March 15, 2011, so that they can be included in the printed agenda for synod.

"Overtures dealing with other matters found in the printed synodical agenda can be received as late as May 15, 2011," says Synodical Services director Diane Recker. "However, such late overtures will then only be printed in the supplementary agenda and distributed at synod."

Local church leaders unable to download these documents for study may request a free, printed copy of each report (one copy per congregation) by calling Faith Alive Christian Resources at 1-800-333-8300.

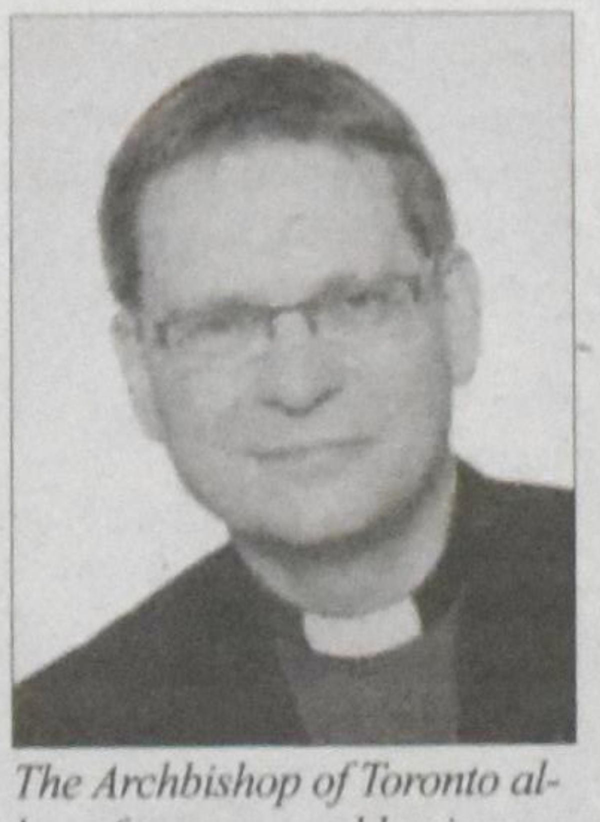
Toronto: Anglican archbishop makes room for same-sex blessings

TORONTO (ChristianPost) – A bishop within the Anglican Church of Canada will begin granting permission to some parishes in his diocese to bless same-sex unions. The Archbishop of Toronto, the Most Rev. Colin Johnson, issued pastoral guidelines this month to people in "stable committed same-gender relationships" seeking a blessing of their commitment.

"The diversity of our diocesan community demonstrates that we are called to witness to the faith in a variety of ways, and though such witness is rooted in differing interpretations and understanding of holy scripture and the tradition, they are recognizably Anglican," the archbishops' guidelines state.

In June last year the Anglican Church of Canada General Synod determined that it could not come to a common mind on the controversial issue, that a legislative approach would not be appropriate at the time, and that there are and will be a variety of practices across the Canadian church body. With that, the Synod agreed to have "more conversation" on the matter.

The Anglican Church of Canada, representing 800,000 Anglicans, does not formally allow same-sex blessings and officially remains committed to the moratoria Anglican leaders worldwide agreed to in 2004. Nevertheless, many Canadian dioceses have already permitted the blessing of same-sex unions, which in turn has contributed to the widening rift within the global Anglican Communion.



The Archbishop of Toronto allows for same sex-blessings.

Conservative Anglicans have repeatedly denounced the pro-gay actions of the West and distanced themselves from their more liberal brethren. Last year, parishes representing some 100,000 conservative Anglicans in the United States and Canada constituted their own body, separating themselves from the Anglican Church of Canada and the U.S. Episcopal Church – which has so far ordained two openly gay bishops.

The Rt. Rev. Robert Duncan, archbishop of the newly formed Anglican Church in North America, declared last month that they are the fastest growing denomination in the United States.

The new guidelines "bless" same-sex couples but still distinguish that blessing from "marriage." Clergy who object will be asked to "exercise pastoral generosity" by referring the couples, if requested, to a more favorable priest. The guidelines also state, "It is expected that no one will be excluded from receiving the Eucharist or baptism in any parish on the basis of their sexual orientation or their views on the issue of same gender blessings, whether in favor or opposed."

Matt Kennedy, conservative Anglican blogger at StandFirminFaith.com, says the guidelines are not very accommodating for orthodox Anglicans. "Up to this point it has been possible for an orthodox priest or deacon to remain in even the most liberal diocese in the [Anglican Church of Canada] and [The Episcopal Church] without compromising his integrity. No more," Kennedy wrote. "This is the first diocese in North America in which orthodox 'loyal dissent' is no longer possible. I am certain it will not be the last."

U.S.: White House aligns with Supreme Court conservatives in 'religious schools' case

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CNA) – As the U.S. Supreme Court considered a case involving tax credits and religious education on November 3, indications of a surprising agreement emerged between some of the court's most conservative justices and the Obama administration.

The case pits the Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization against a group of citizens charging that a 1997 government tax-credit program amounted to a state establishment of religion. The program allowed taxpayers to donate money toward a variety of private scholarship foundations rather than paying the same amount to the government through taxes.

In 2002 the Supreme Court ruled that a school voucher program in Ohio that gives parents a tuition grant to be used toward a range of secular or religious schools did not violate the "establishment clause." In April 2009, however, a panel of judges on the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals – a court known for its left-of-center rulings – decided that the Arizona tax-credit program might still amount to "an establishment of religion."

The Obama administration disagreed, noting that the Arizona statute does not privilege religious education, and maintaining that it passes the constitutional test at least as easily as the Ohio vouchers. As the high court heard oral arguments in the case on November 3, Justices Antonin Scalia, Samuel Alito and Chief Justice John Roberts agreed with the White House's argument.

In a strong gesture of support for the Christian tuition organization, acting U.S. Solicitor General Neal Kaytal said opponents of the tax credit had no case. "Not a cent" of taxpayers' money was even indirectly funding "religious schools," the solicitor general observed. "Not a fraction of a cent.... As you track the taxpayers' dollars, it doesn't actually fund any religious program." Thus, the Obama-appointed solicitor general said, challengers of the Arizona law could not bring a complaint as taxpayers, nor could they claim an establishment of religion.

No forced contribution

Pursuing this line of reasoning, Chief Justice Roberts questioned Paul Bender, a Phoenix attorney representing those questioning the law. The Chief Justice asked Bender how the state could be "discriminating on the basis of religion" if it "doesn't care" whether individuals receive the tax credit for donating to religious or secular scholarship funds.

Justice Scalia indicated that he saw no real difference between Arizona's tax credit system and the widespread practice of tax deductions, which individuals can claim for their donations to religious charities.

Bender responded that although the statute as written is "religiously neutral," the government is nevertheless allowing private money that it could legitimately claim as tax money to be directed instead toward religious schools in a majority of cases. The money, Bender asserted, is actually "not a contribution" to the tuition charities, since the government is forcing individuals to choose between paying it in taxes or directing it to the scholarship funds.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor re-articulated Bender's argument as an assertion that the scholarship money "does belong to the state," even though it is never actually taxed. She said it could be considered "tax money . . . that private individuals are using." Justice Alito, however, objected to that response, saying it amounted to an assertion that "all (private) money belongs to the government" except the amount it "doesn't take" by taxation.

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life notes that the court's eventual ruling – expected before the summer – could affect a number of ongoing lower court cases that directly challenge religious groups' legal privileges.

Ontario Agricultural College introduces alternative course

Elbert van Donkersgoed

GUELPH, Ont. (Plumbline) – The Ontario Agricultural College at the University of Guelph is offering a new, multi-disciplinary course in the winter semester called "Alternative Agricultures: Perspectives on the Local Food Movement."

Initiated by OAC graduate students, with the support of the dean and associate dean (external), the course is intended to fill a gap in the agriculture curriculum and meet the ever-growing need for consideration of food systems within their social and ecological frameworks.

Students will study the linkages among land, food and community through the examination of the social, economic, environmental and political aspects of both the mainstream and emerging trends in the food system.

Britain: Sex shop in school-related shopping area faces legal hurdle

TRURO, CORNWALL (TCI) – A sex shop in Truro, Cornwall, UK, that opened right next to a school uniform shop is facing a legal challenge from a local resident and a Christian charity.

A company called Mrs. Palm Limited was controversially given the go-ahead to open a sex shop in Truro by Cornwall Council at the end of this past summer, but many locals immediately began expressing concerns.

Now, Truro city councilor and former mayor Armorel Carlyon, along with The Christian Institute, is calling for a judicial review. Such a review would allow a court to decide whether a public body has acted lawfully.

Simon Calvert says, "Like a lot of people, we were shocked when Cornwall Council agreed to license a sex shop in a family shopping area, right next door to a school uniform shop. The sex shop licensing regime gives councils discretion to say No but Cornwall chose to say Yes. There is a serious issue of principle at stake for the whole country, not just Cornwall."

Calvert added, "If it is OK to license shops to sell hardcore porn next to premises routinely used by children and families, then nowhere is safe. What next? A sex shop adjacent to a nursery school? We think there are strong grounds for inviting the court to look at this decision and to see if Cornwall correctly followed the law."

A local news website reported a 700-name petition had been gathered and 90 complaints about the proposed sex shop have been made. One mother said she is concerned her children will see the sex shop when going into the school uniform shop. "I don't think it's right to have a shop like that and I'm sad to see it happening in Truro," said Siobhan Ward.

The judicial review has yet to be carried out, though the court involved confirmed that it has received a request for such a review.

Calvin College opens renewed fine arts center

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA/Calvin College) – The building known for more than 40 years as the Fine Arts Center, or F-A-C, to countless visitors to Calvin College has been transformed into what looks like an entirely new state-of-the-art facility. The renewed building is called the Covenant Fine Arts Center.

The original building opened in 1966. Besides presenting lectures, concerts and other arts performances, and housing academic offices, practices rooms and classrooms, its main auditorium has hosted Christian Reformed Church synods almost every year since that time.

Work on the $15 million (US) remodeling job began in May 2009. It has added 40,000 square feet of space to the original 84,000 square-foot FAC. Money for the project came largely from an overall capital campaign for the college and a major anonymous donor.

Classrooms have been added or updated and rebuilt, areas for the music department have been substantially enhanced, and a recital hall has been constructed. But among the most striking changes is an expansive lobby that contains a prominent staircase, large windows, comfortable furniture and a sculpted rock presented as a gift by the anonymous donor who helped to underwrite the renovation and expansion.

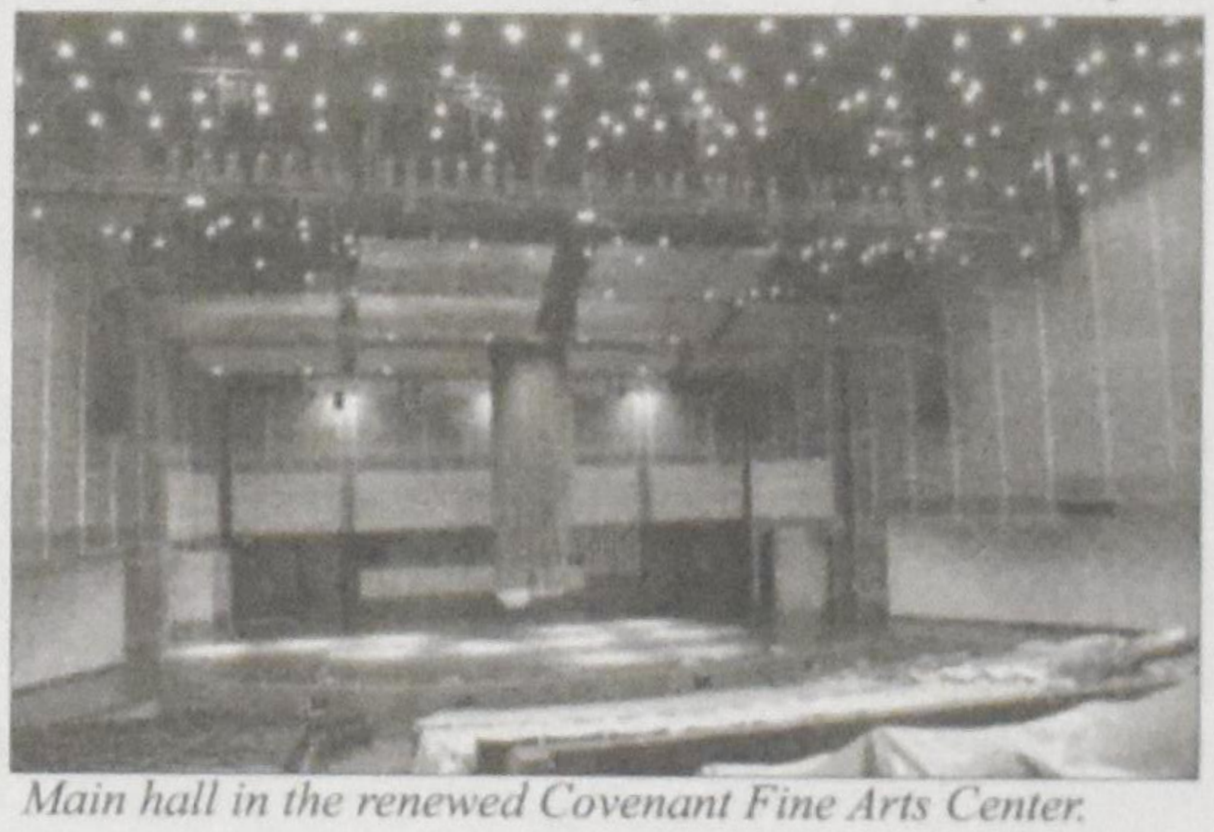
Striking as well is the 3,800-square-foot, glass-enclosed Center Art Gallery just off the lobby. The gallery will be able to feature a wide range of works and exhibitions.

Joel Zwart

"This gives us much more space and flexibility. We've gone from one to three gallery spaces," said Joel Zwart, director of exhibitions and a native of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. "My hope is that this will be more of a campus gallery. I'm really excited about our ability to share art with so many people."

The exhibition space houses two galleries for displaying a rotating selection from Calvin's 1,500-piece permanent collection, and a larger gallery (whose 33-foot walls are capped with a light well) for temporary exhibitions.

In the main auditorium/concert hall the acoustics were improved and there is upgraded seating and improved lighting. "We've made this building a lot more environmentally friendly," said Beezhold. It will not be "fully functional" – meaning everyone will have moved in and all of the work will be completed – until early next year.



Main hall in the renewed Covenant Fine Arts Center.

Events that inaugurated the Covenant Fine Arts Center last month included various music performances, a lecture by a well known author (Walter Wangerin), readings by faculty and students, and an art exhibition on "The Humor and Wit of Pieter Bruegel the Elder" accompanied by a lecture on that 16th century Dutch painter by Calvin art history professor Henry Luttikhuizen.

Henry Luttikhuizen

Columns

Airport Ecology

Flowers & Thistles
Curt Gesch

in which the rural bumpkin encounters other kinds of twits than he sees at his bird feeder, and is not amused

Tomorrow, God willing, I'll be traveling to Vancouver with a friend who has some medical tests scheduled. We are travelling by airplane. The flight, in a Dash 8 or other small airplane, will be short, uneventful and friendly. Chances are we will know half dozen or more passengers on the plane. The snack will be *sans* nuts, peanuts, gluten, or anything else that might cause anyone a problem. It will also be without flavour.

Then we will arrive at the airport to experience the best side of airports: service. The good folks at Vancouver International Airport (YVR) will meet us at the gate with a wheelchair. Then a cart to take us through the airport to the taxi rank. The service personnel will be, if my experience is any indication, polite and friendly and helpful.

******

If we had more time and lots of energy to walk we could see more people. Many of them would be rushing. Few would meet our eyes. Apparently, there is a spot in the middle distance that contains something wonderful, because many commuters seem to be staring in awe, wonder (or idiocy) over there. I've experienced this in VYR and O'Hare Field, JFK, and Denver airports.

In big airports I see many passengers glued to hand-held devices that they rub with their thumbs. I checked it out and they could be computerized do-dads that let them read e-mail, look at hockey games, write and receive messages. They tweet and twitter, I'm told. These terms, normally used for avian vocalization, are apparently ways of sending small bursts of words to *someone* or a covey of *someones*. It works both ways: the traveller can also receive messages like *lol*.

In big airports I encounter people who have some sort of hearing device, complete with a microphone. They talk loudly to people in far-off parts. If my friend and I were not on a cart, we could have a great time trying to figure out the other half of the conversation:

"Well, tell him to get the 31k Form over to headquarters."

"I'm right near the door; you should be able to see me now."

"Could you make sure that the conference is set up and ready?"

"I love you, too, but I won't make it home tonight."

*****

I try not to be too condemnatory towards people handicapped by their dependence on these various machines. After all, we'll be using a cart and wheelchair this time. Besides, I am a member of the Christian Reformed Church's Disabilities Concerns Committee, and I try to be sensitive. Perhaps I need to see how these gadget people can belong, how they can serve.

Several times I've been tempted to acquire some of these devices and learn how to use them, but I have always hesitated. I find that I'd have less time to imagine. As long as I am able to amble slowly through the terminal, I can people-watch, wondering which one of the people rushing past with an attaché case is a member of Conrad Black's legal team, and which hip-hop artist, sliding and swaying down the hallway, is a CIA agent in obvious disguise. I'd try to guess the country of origin for each fly-rodding-toting traveller, each skiier. Does the man in the boots and cowboy hat come from Calgary, Denver, or is he a man with a great sense of humour arriving from Slovakia?

Gadgetless, I can look at the security employees and say "good-evening" to them. I can say "*Buenas dias,*" or "*Grüsse Gott*" or "*Namaste.*" I will be able to help someone whose looks shout "confused." I will be able to ask the information counter people how their day is going. I can get a shoe shine, strike up a conversation with a man from India, a woman from Pakistan, a black Canadian with an English accent, and wish them God's blessing.

*****

If an airport is part of nature, I'd be tempted to say it is a hive. Unlike a true hive, however, only the employees seem united by common purpose. The visitors seem caught up in their sub-groups, having left the human hive behind while travelling.

At least, my friend and I will have opportunity to speak actual words to those who assist us in the airport, in the taxi, and at the hotel and hospital. It will be our "calling" to remind everyone we can that we are all part of the human family, of inestimable value, made in God's image. It's a calling we all have, I think: whether we are two retired travellers, or employees of VYR, or wireless, wired-up . . . drones?

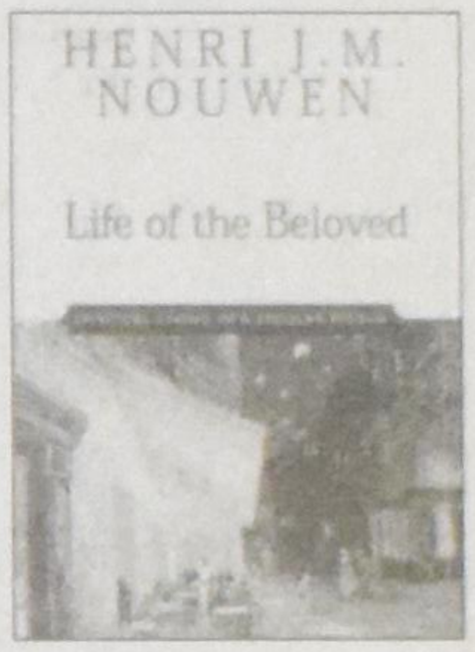
Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) is thinking of getting a blackberry (cane). He lives in Quick, B.C.

Patchwork Words
Melissa Kuipers

The gift of singleness within community

My roommate and I have been talking about how to accept that we are loved.

"It's one of the most difficult things we do in life," she said. Really? Doesn't our culture struggle with thinking too much of ourselves, with a sense of entitlement, with inflated egos that tell us we deserve whatever we want?



But as I thought about it, behind the arrogance and narcissism of our culture is a deeper need, I believe. Perhaps we misdirect our longings to be loved with attempts to convince ourselves we are worthy.

At the root of it is our longing to know, as Henri Nouwen says in *Life of the Beloved*, that we are Beloved. Fully and truly loved, belonging to God, accepted and intimately known by him. We long to hear and believe "the voice that says, "You are my Beloved, on whom my favour rests. I have molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. I have carved you in the palms of my hands and hidden you in the shadow of my embrace."

Belovedness within community

The paradox is that we cannot function healthily in relationship with others unless we have a sense of our Belovedness. At the same time, we cannot fully grasp our Belovedness without a strong sense of community.

I think it's particularly difficult for singles to find communities today because of how privatized our lives have become. As a friend recently said, "We don't meet in public spaces too often in North America. We aren't gathering at wells or common meeting spaces everyday. We go to people's homes to interact with each other." Urbanization has – ironically – increased our isolation. We have more people packed into smaller places, but we don't actually connect with the vast majority of people we see each day. We have less time for people, and relationships become increasingly superficial. In this societal environment, authentic relationships become so imperative.

The way I see it, when God said to Adam, "It is not good for man to be alone," I think he was saying a lot more than a statement about everyone needing to find a mate. Yes, spouses are wonderful and marriage is the first institution created by God – but I believe he was speaking more broadly about a longing in the human condition, a longing for relationship which is manifested in the triune nature of God. We are meant to be with others, to exist in committed relationships.

During my intensely pious days as a teenager (going from youth retreat to youth retreat, devoted to the pursuit of maintaining a perpetual spiritual high), I was often plagued by guilt because of the fact that I longed so much for relationships of all kinds: familial, friendships, more-than-friendship. The romantic longing was the one that caused me the most grief because I was convinced I should be in love with Jesus alone and any other feelings were distractions from my devotion to him. It feels silly now to admit this teenage angst manifested in an attempt to stave off all things romantic, but I still feel the relief that came when I realized I had forgotten about this verse in Genesis, that I was created with a need – not just post-fall, but pre-fall – to be in intimate connection with others. After God had called all of his spectacular creation good, he deemed that the horizontal relationships between man and his surroundings wasn't good yet, wouldn't be good until he had others with which to share the wonder of God's love.

How to thrive

I feel now that this is how we thrive as singles: we recognize the longing for relationship and we fill it with strong communities. We experience God's nearness through our personal encounters with him (prayer, scripture reading and other spiritual disciplines) and never divorce that from our rootedness with others. We recognize the longing for marriage and rather than repressing it, we lift it before God. We remain thankful for the blessings of the gift of singleness and balance that with an openness to give up that singleness for a different way to serve God: in commitment, in family, in the goodness that is marriage. And we share our longings vulnerably and honestly with those within our community.

"Isn't that what friendship is all about," asks Nouwen: "giving to each other the gift of our Belovedness?"

Melissa Kuipers (mckuip@gmail.com) is a full-time student completing a Masters of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Toronto.

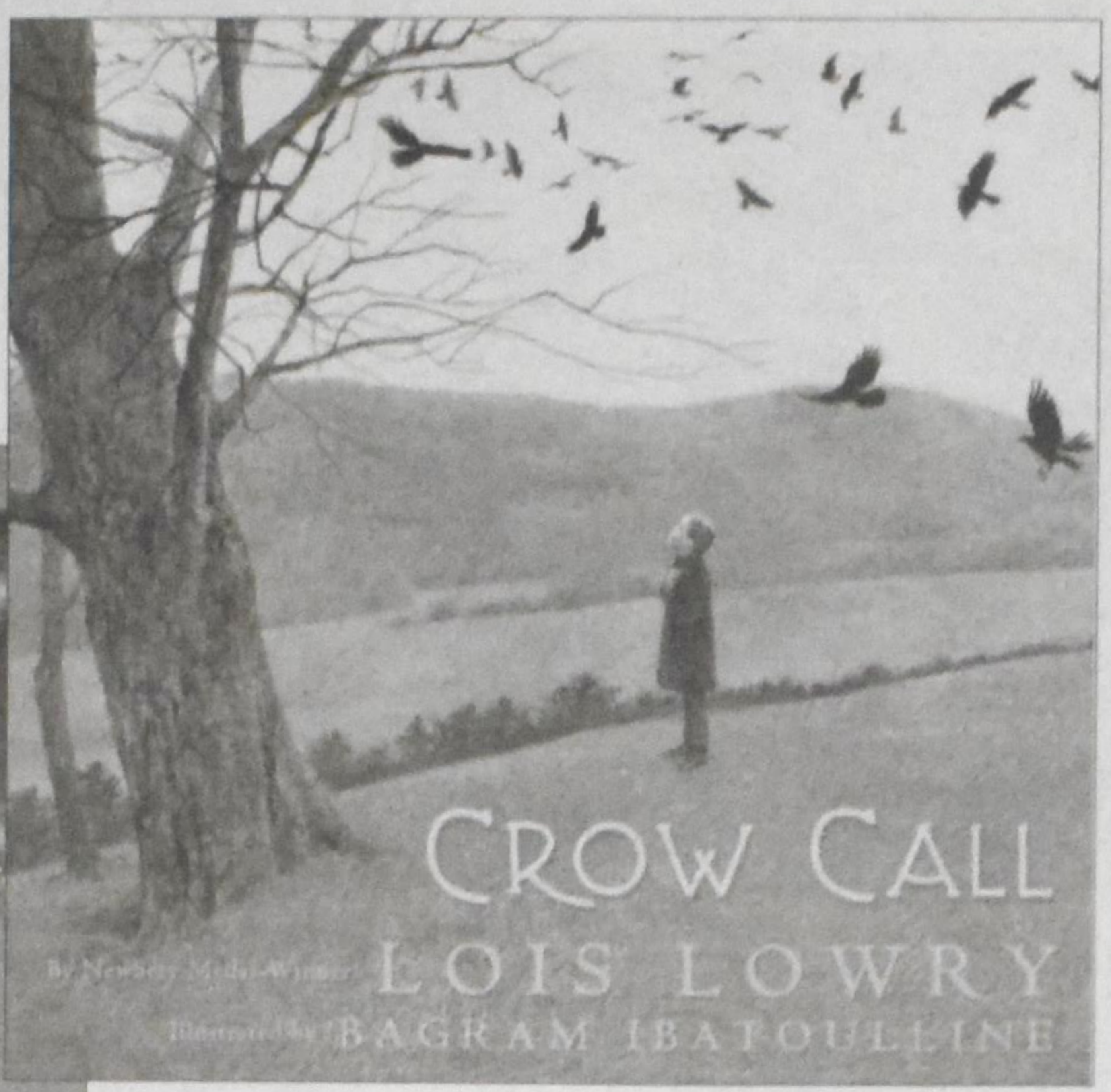
Five children's books to pick up this holiday season

Reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

The Stars Will Still Shine

by Cynthia Rylant.
Illustrated by Tiphanie Beeke
(HarperCollinsPublishers, 2005)

We live in a world where children often face tremendous changes and are fearful as a result. The Stars Will Still Shine reassures youngsters that in the coming year "the sky will still be there/ the stars will still shine/ birds will fly over us/ church bells will chime." The book celebrates continuity in nature: "cows will have calves/ kittens will sleep/ flowers will bloom/ (a promise they keep)." Children are assured that they will not go hungry: "we shall have peaches/ we shall have pie/ we shall have ice cream/ three scoops high!" Kids are comforted in the knowledge that they will be loved unconditionally: "and in this new year/ love will be strong/ growing and growing/ all the days long." In conclusion, the author subtly reveals God's love: "There will be goodness/ there will be grace/ there will be light/ in every dark place./ The sky will still be there/ the stars will still shine/ birds will fly over us/ church bells will chime." Vivid illustrations complement the simple, joyful text.



Crow Call

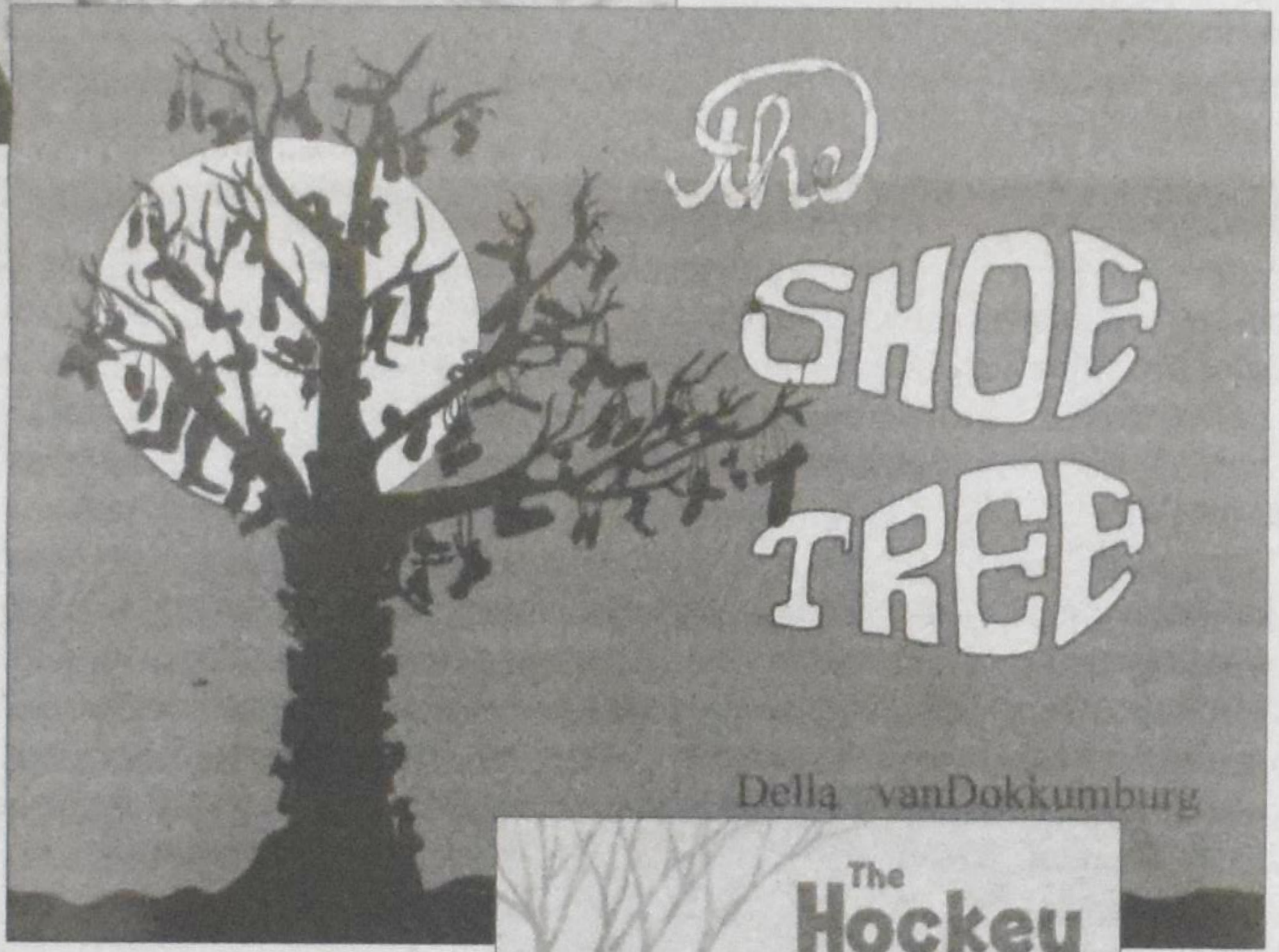
by Lois Lowry.
Illustrated by Bagram Ibatoulline
(Scholastic Press, 2009).

For years, young Lizzie's father has been absent from home while he served in the army. When he returns, Lizzie is shy in his presence, trying to find her way with a man who is virtually a stranger to her. When Lizzie and her father go on a hunting trip together, she experiences his generosity, humour, and understanding.

Lizzie struggles with the knowledge that her dad is a hunter. Hunters kill. She doesn't want her dad to kill the crows they are hunting because, she says, "they might have babies to take care of." She thinks of the crows as her friends.

When her dad allows her to make the crow call, the birds gather above Lizzie. But he doesn't shoot them because he understands Lizzie's compassionate heart and deep concern. Lizzie notices that her dad carries his gun carefully, and thinks, "though I am grateful to him for not using it, I feel that there is no need to say thank you – Daddy knows already."

Two themes – the deepening love of a parent and child and the destructive influence of weapons and war – weave together in this story based on the author's life.



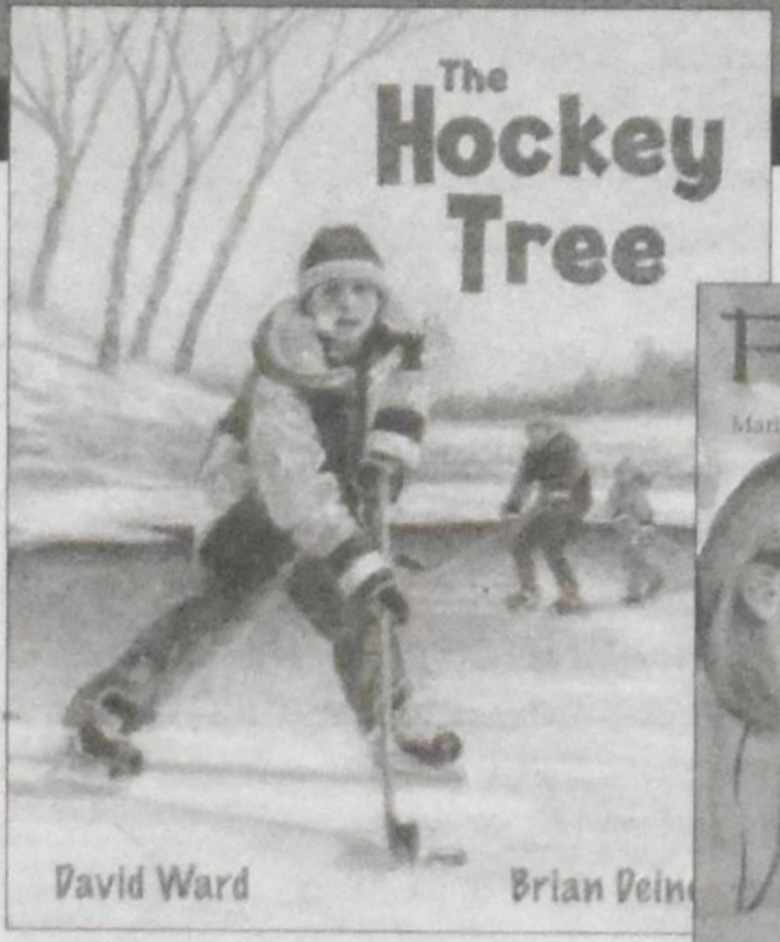
The Shoe Tree

by Della vanDokkumburg.
(Cones To Go Press, 2010)

The Shoe Tree vividly portrays the lives of Dutch immigrants in Canada. Based on the experiences of the author's parents, the story, told in rhyme, depicts the hardships and joys of life in a new land. Though work lasts from dawn to dusk and every coin and bill is saved, the couple rejoice in the birth of their first child. Significantly, the new immigrants plant five young maple trees, only one of which survives a terrible storm. That tree becomes the family's shoe tree. In the following years, a variety of worn out shoes are hung from it: white baby shoes, wedding boots, army boots, slippers and many more.

The Shoe Tree insightfully captures the benefits of a tradition which strengthens a growing family's bonds through immigration, war, birth and death. After reading vanDokkumburg's delightful tale, children living in our fast-paced, often rootless society might want to have a shoe tree of their own to tell their families' stories.

VanDokkumburg is donating a portion of the proceeds of her book to Pier 21, Canada's Immigration Museum, in Halifax, N.S.



The Hockey Tree

by David Ward.
Illustrated by Brian Deines
(North Winds Press, 2006)

When Humboldt Lake in Saskatchewan finally freezes, Owen, his dad and his sister, Holly, head out to the ice for a day of skating. The trip to the lake seems to take forever, but finally they arrive. Ice-fishermen huddle on the ice as the threesome lace their skates and prepare to play. A vigorous game of hockey ensues as the fishermen watch from a distance.

Though Owen is impatient with Holly's hockey skills, she proves herself a strong player. In fact, with a mighty whack, she inadvertently sends the puck flying into a fishing hole. Exasperated, Owen chides her because no puck means no hockey. But Owen's dad has an unexpected solution. He suggests that they look for a hockey tree – a tree which has fallen over and which has a trunk as big around as a puck. When they find one, Owen's dad uses the saw he had in the van to cut away several wedges of wood. After a fisherman puts the chunks of wood into his net and dips them momentarily into the lake, the innovative pucks save the day. A new game is begun, and soon many other skaters join in.

The Hockey Tree celebrates more than the game of hockey. It subtly portrays human ingenuity, the pleasure of spending time with family and the delight of a Canadian winter.

Finding Joy

by Marion Coste.
Illustrated by Yong Chen
(Boyds Mills Press, 2006)

Baby Shu-li is born in China, where the government's one-child policy has a profound impact on her future. Her loving, grieving parents abandon her beneath a bridge. A note pinned to her blanket states: "This is our Shu-li. Please take care of her. No room for girls." Discovered by an old woman before she dies, Shu-li is brought to an orphanage where she is nurtured and loved.

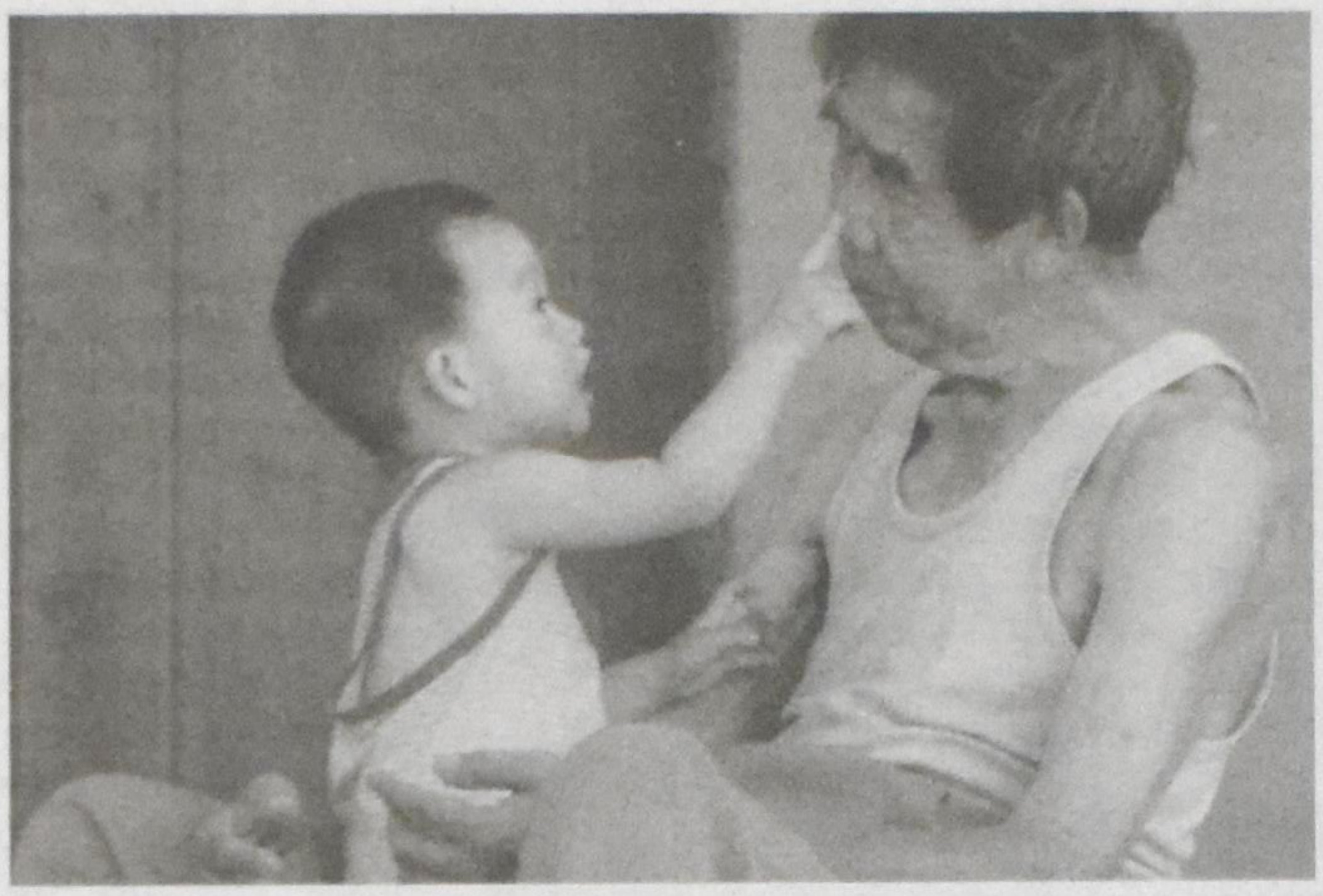
Meanwhile, across the world, a husband and wife with grown children long to have another girl. Finding Joy is the story of the woman's journey to China to adopt Shu-li – later named Joy – and to bring her home to her new family across the ocean. Sensitive watercolour illustrations bring to life the sorrow and joy inherent in Shu-li's life. Author's notes inform readers of the destructive impact of China's one-child policy.

- Sonya VanderVeen Feddema (sonyavf@hotmail.ca) is a freelance writer and author who lives in St Catharines, Ontario.

Features

It ain't no disgrace: growing older, from the expert (apparently)

Curt Gesch



Calvin Theological Seminary published a whole issue of Forum about death and dying. *Christian Courier* interviewed Thomas Lynch, surely the most literary undertaker in North America. Theologian Thomas Long's thoughts about funerals were published in The New York Times. Another Christian magazine, asked me to write about growing old. At 61½ years old, I felt alternately honoured and insulted. My article, however, didn't meet their needs.

To paraphrase Kin Hubbard, "It's no disgrace to be old, but it might as well be."

From the horse's mouth (just don't check its teeth)

My research began with a very informal survey; I roped in my friends and relatives. The question: "What's the worst thing about growing old?"

- "It's the pits."
- "It's hard when you lose your sight and hearing."
- "Arthritis makes getting up difficult each morning."
- "I can't read anymore. Sure, I gets books on tape from the library, but it's not the same thing."
- "Forgetting names."
- "Eating the same food I used to eat for muscles, now becomes flab."
- "Keeping up with technology, adjusting to life is very difficult."
- "Physical deterioration."
- "We become less reckless." [More staid.]
- "It's hard to change your mindset when you're old."
- "They got me a king-sized bed because I fell out of the other one, but now I can't catch Ma when I want to."

I used to love expounding on Ecclesiastes 12:1 when I was a Bible teacher. I'd remind the students that they were in the prime of life, that it seemed as if they could burn the candle at both ends, that their digestive systems could handle the most atrocious things, and that they had better exult in their youth. And remember their Creator.

Truth to tell, I didn't really consider myself "covered" by the rest of Ecclesiastes 12. I knew people who had these problems of sight and sleeplessness, but really, really, I wasn't there yet.

I looked further into the Bible's stories of ageing (see accompanying article, "Heroes of ageing").

Yes, I knew about old people:

Item: One of my elderly friends declines long social visits. The problem is not cute: incontinence.

Item: An acquaintance moved to a new home. While she was cleaning up in the new kitchen, she looked outside and called out to her husband: "Come quick – there's a strange old man in the yard." Her husband heard her, stopped his yard work and turned around to face his still youthful but embarrassed wife.

Item: A close friend was shopping for clothes and noticed a quite attractive lady (perhaps in her later 30s) checking the racks. He glanced for a closer look and then away, having discovered that an old man was also checking her out. All the supporting posts in that store were mirrored.

Item: "Yah, well, it's fine to be retired, but sometimes I'd like to be able to do something on the farm again."

Expectations (when should you stop having them?)

Just yesterday, I sent an e-mail to my son saying, "Ecclesiastes makes sense to me today." One of my friends wryly commented: "And you think it is going to get better?"

I know I am getting old when every day seems cloudy, muscles don't lift, tympanum don't vibrate, desire is no longer stirred, and a grasshopper finds the end of his summer in frosty mornings, when even the industrious ant reaches the end of her working days. Then I get discouraged.

On the other hand, I read about an 80+ year-old tenant farmer, a child of slaves, plowing a piece of grubbed-out pine barren in South Carolina. When he and his mule stopped for a break, a passing quail hunter asked how things were going: "Ah'll have a really good farm here in about twenty years," was the reply.

That anonymous tenant farmer reminds me of a real person. I never recall meeting Mr. Wentz, but I remember people talking about him. He was a retired man who bought a field just west of Cedar Grove, Wisconsin. He promptly planted apple trees. "Why is he doing that?" I asked myself, "He'll never live to get a crop."

Mr. Wenz lived to get a crop – many crops. And he died with a flourishing orchard. His successors didn't keep up the orchard, but Mr. Wentz was spared seeing that. He also didn't see the orchard run down until it became an oasis for wildlife. He didn't see it being subdivided into very large, highly desirable lots. I wish I could have a talk with Mr. Wentz and tell him how his story has inspired me.

But I've had my satisfaction as I've grown older. This year I'm starting an experimental farm, growing new forages on tiny plots: cicer milkvetch, sainfoin, and fenugreek. Just the other day someone asked me, "What will be the end result of the experiment? What do you expect?"

All I can say is peace. Tilling the ground for another year, while my hip holds out. Walking the rows in the cool of the morning and the cool of the evening. Learning to see what goes right instead what could go wrong.

As opposed to some parts of ageing, which Irving Layton called, "The inescapable lousiness of growing old," I want peace.

All in all, my hope for everyone is the hope of Simeon: the peace that enables you to say, "Enough. I'm ready." At whatever age.

May my last conscious thought be
of grace that forgave my sin
that gave me faith.
As I slowly disappear from what we know
of humanity
may I be surrounded
by those given the grace to care for me.
But mostly? Peace, give me peace.

Shalom aleikum.

Curt Gesch is a retired person a little younger than James Calvin Schaap. He lives in Quick, British Columbia.

Heroes of ageing

Curt Gesch

You probably thought an article on ageing would be written by an old man.

I did, too. When a Christian magazine editor asked me to write on ageing, my 61½ years remonstrated, "Shouldn't you ask someone old?" On the other hand, according to the clock, we all age one day each twenty-four hours. According to the calendar, we all age one year for every 365¼ days or twelve months.

But maybe ageing isn't something to be ashamed of. So, even though my article didn't end up in that publication, I went in search of scripture's heroes of ageing.

The really old testament

Being enamoured of great stories and under a compulsion to read my Bible, I became acquainted with Methusaleh at an early age. Some man. He lived 969 years, beating out Adam (930 years), Seth (912), Enosh (905), Kenan (910), Mahalel (only 895, a mere stripling), Jared (962, a close second), Enoch (although he apparently didn't die, he only made 365, a year of years), and Lamech (only 777).

We know quite a bit about Noah, who made it to 950 years old. He started having children at 500, without – apparently – resorting to rhino horn. But Methusaleh was the record holder.

You couldn't keep me away from those stories and genealogies. Later, I learned to subtract and found out a dismaying fact. Methusaleh had a son, Lamech at 180. Lamech had Noah at 182. The flood came sometime after Noah's children were born. They came, as I said, when Noah was 500. The flood came when Noah was 600. That meant that, Grandfather Lamech and Great-grandpa Methusaleh died in the flood.

I decided that Methusaleh was not my hero after all.

Abraham was another likely candidate. By his time, his longevity was closer to what I experienced, but Abraham still made it to 175 years. But he was quite a man. He had faith in God (Gen. 15:6) and lived that faith (Hebrews 11). He had a son, Isaac, with his wife, Sarah, when he was 100 and Sarah 90. I blocked out my imagination about century-old conjugal relationships when I was young, but I can imagine – at my advanced age of 61 ½ years – Abraham and Sarah saying, "Well, God promised. I think we'd better try again."

After Sarah died, Abraham married again and had six more sons! Virile, yes, but that might be too virile.

Ah, Moses. His life was geometrical: 40 years as prince; 40 years chasing sheep among thorns, rocks, and sand; 40 years back in the wilderness with a mob of rebellious people. And then, when he seemingly had achieved his goals, God informed him that it was the end, that he would die in Moab, seeing the land of promise but not entering it.

One hundred twenty is pretty good – not 969, but then he didn't die in a flood. He didn't "walk with God" like Enoch, but God gave him a special, honoured grave, free from gawkers and idol-makers. And don't forget that later Moses came back to see Jesus

Someone else's responsibility?
Training children up in the way they should go

Lynn Klammer

"Children who are never given responsibility will never take responsibility." I have said it many times in my work as a psychologist, yet I had never truly taken the words to heart personally. As a mother of four small children, I had naturally found that it was faster and simpler to do everything myself in regards to the daily running of the household. I certainly believed in letting children "help" with special tasks like baking a cake or gathering the garden produce, but all of the everyday cooking and cleaning naturally fell to me. It wasn't until recently that I looked around and realized I was fighting a losing battle with the running of the household. Every day I washed dishes, did laundry and struggled to pick up, put away and organize… but all for nothing. By the next day, my work would be undone, and I was faced with the unpleasant realization that my children had become lazy, slovenly and spoiled. The children's places at the dinner table were perpetually littered with crumbs (both table and floor); coats would be carelessly flung upon the floor inside the closet; and even the most costly, fragile of toys would be left on the floor where they had last been played with – presumably with the thought that "someone else" would see to their care. That "someone else" had clearly become me.

A difficult transition

My realization of the need to take drastic action was a slow one. Day after day, the perpetual hopeless struggle to maintain order continued until I finally hit bottom. Someone had left a puddle of lemonade on the kitchen floor without bothering to clean it up and I (of course), walked right through it. As I stood there in my wet, sticky socks contemplating the kind of thoughtlessness it required to make such a mess and then simply walk away, it finally sunk in that I would have to make a dramatic change in my parenting methods. And so, with the courage of a knight going into battle, I grasped responsibility, placed it firmly into the hands of my children, and then stoically backed away.

The result of my brave decision was chaos. Within the first week, the trash basket in my son's bathroom overflowed, the kitchen counter became a rainbow of sticky splotches, and my son actually missed a day of school (when he wouldn't get out of bed in the morning, I left without him). Yes, it was certainly an experience that tested my controlling, do-for-others nature…but it got better.

As a result of the bathroom not being kept properly clean, my son (who was in charge of that job) had to now share that room with this three sisters. The girls soon learned that cleaning the kitchen counter immediately was much faster and easier than letting the spills turn to concrete. And my son realized that missing a day of school meant a full day of unending labor at home (most of which were jobs he particularly disliked).

Experience by experience, the children began to learn that with responsibility comes consequences, and most importantly they learned that being responsible for something meant that "someone else" wouldn't bail you out if you forgot or just didn't want to do your job.

I still struggle with the management of the household, but to a far lesser extent. My children are learning to meet their responsibilities, and I am learning to be realistic in my expectations. We still have crumbs under the table, but now my 8-year-old vacuums them up most days. The coats are still thrown on the floor sometimes, but most of the time they are hung up. And my son never over-sleeps and misses school. One step at a time, my children are managing the responsibility I have given them, and it bodes well for the future.

10 Tips for teaching children responsibility

1) Draw up a signed contract. – Sit down as a family and divide up the duties among the family members (including yourself). Allow each child to voice his/her opinion, and have each sign the list when it's done. Post it somewhere visible (ours is on the refrigerator).
2) Have realistic expectations – Don't expect your child to do everything perfectly right from the start. Also, set age-appropriate jobs. A six-year-old, for instance, probably isn't capable of doing the wash, but they can fold and put away towels after they're done.
3) Allow for questions and negotiation (but only prior to start of job assignment). – Children need to feel "ownership" of household policies.
4) Be fair. – Don't stereotype or show favoritism. Boys can do dishes as well as girls, and girls can do lawn work.
5) Carefully outline responsibility and consequence. – Everyone needs to understand what's expected and what will happen if the expectations aren't met.
6) Allow time for adjustment. – After a week or so, you may need to adjust the jobs if you find your child is still too young or uncoordinated for the job you've assigned. Children may also need reminders from time to time.
7) Be strict with consequences. – As a parent you know that one of the most important elements of good parenting is consistency. Don't allow excuses, charm or whining to deter you from following through when responsibilities aren't met.
8) Set up a reward system. – You may feel that children should help not because of what's in it for them but simply because they are a part of the family. However, you may also want to offer a modest "allowance" for those who perform their duties well and on time.
9) Make family time a priority. – Work is important, but children need to understand that "play" is also a valuable thing – especially when that play is done as a family unit.
10) Model good behavior. – Show your children through your own behavior that work comes first, and from time to time point out to them what would happen if you didn't perform your household duties.

Lynn Klammer (pinitz@yahoo.com) is a licensed clinical psychologist, educator and bestselling author.

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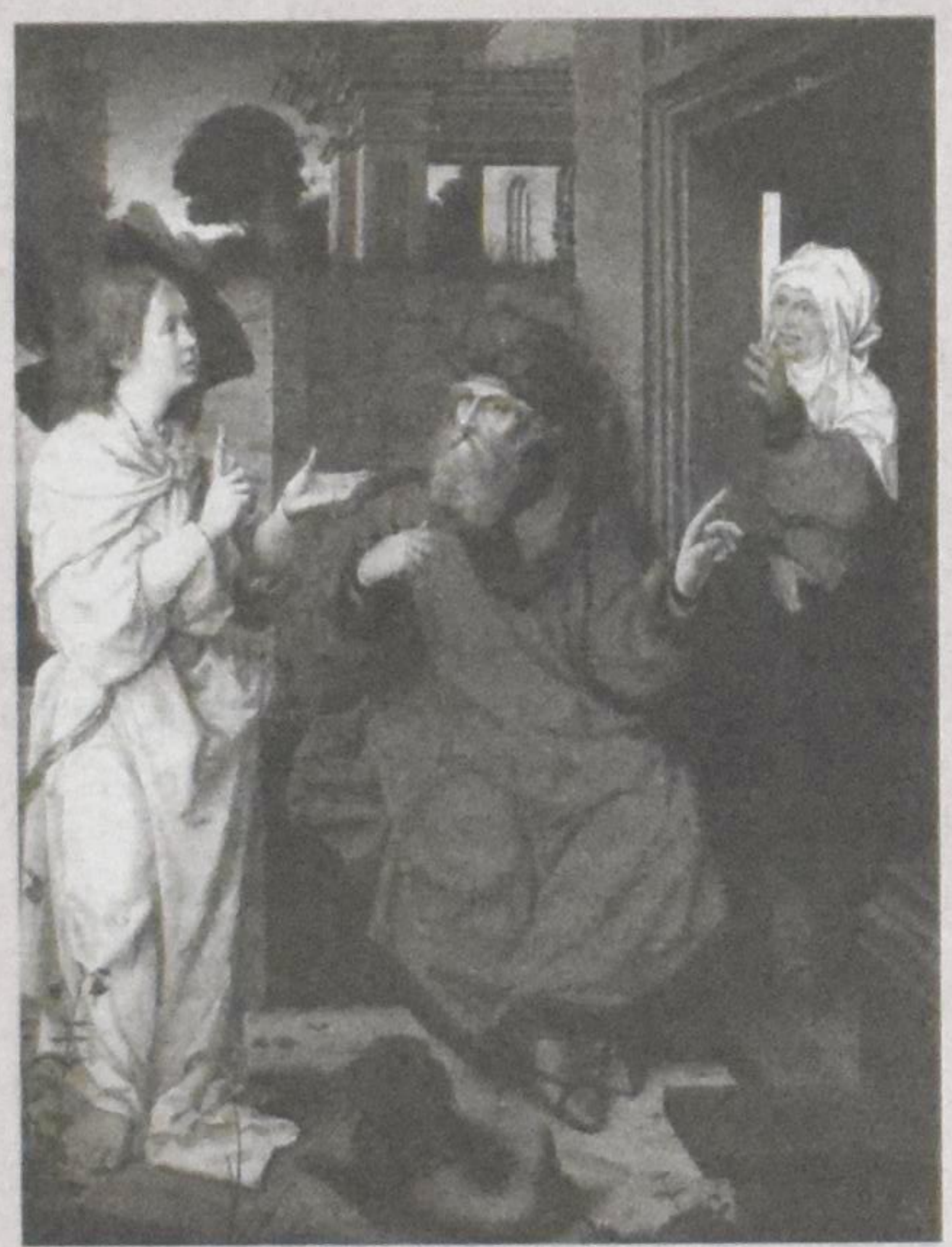
on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Moses was a pretty good guy, temper and all. One time he had to have help holding up his staff, but he was already over 80, and that's understandable. In general, however, he didn't seem to get decrepit. When Moses died, he still had his eyesight, we're told in Deuteronomy 34, "nor [was] his natural strength abated." This "natural strength" may refer to his general well-being. Or, it could be, as some have suggested, that he was still not in need of Viagra. Oy.



Abraham, Sarah, and the Angel *by Jan Provost, 1465-1529.*

Still Moses stays in the running: "there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. . . ."

David was an exciting hero, writing sublime poetry, and doing great deeds of power through faith. His family life? Well, you wouldn't wish it on your enemy. Rape, incest, rebellion, adultery. After 40 years of reigning as king in Judah and Israel, he was tired out, almost gone. He got the most beautiful virgin in Israel for body heat, but he "knew her not." His last words to Solomon were to take revenge, thus getting around David's narrowly-defined promises not to take revenge: "But you're not bound, my son." So, maybe not a hero.

New Testament contenders

My New Testament heroes come down to three: Simeon, Anna and the apostle John.

Anna lived 84 years, devoting herself to expectation, you might say. You might say that she was actually the first missionary: "she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

Simeon, famous for having written the Nunc Dimittis (even if he didn't know Latin), came to the temple, led by the Holy Spirit, just when Joseph and Mary were making an offering and presenting Jesus to the Lord. Like Anna, he recognized the Messiah when he saw him and gave a concise description of what might be called the sovereignty of Christ and the mandate for missions. And then he said, "OK, God, I'm old enough. I've seen the promise fulfilled, or at least the fulfillment started. It's enough. I'm ready."

Then there's the apostle John, who lived through his own arrogant phase ("let me and my brother sit on your right and left, Cousin Jesus"), watched at the cross, became a foster son to Mary, led the early church through troubled times, endured exile at Patmos, saw the visions of the Apocalypse and opposed sin gently, saying, "Little children, keep yourself from idols."

And maybe that's the best wisdom of all, even if that idol is the idea of ageing itself. One thing's certain: I often feel more like the "little children" than the aged expert. But isn't that the way Jesus, the greatest hero of all, wished for us: the faith of a little child?

Features

blog: (n) short for weblog, a website containing an online journal with reflections, comments and links. *Christian Courier* gives you a glimpse into current Reformed thinking by presenting excerpts from some of today's top blogs. Blogs are usually free-association, occasional, off-the-cuff and may not conform to the standards of print publications .

EMERGING ADULTHOOD

(On being twenty-something in 2010 (20+/2010))

" The old forms rattle and the new delay to appear." The tragedy of today's emerging adults is that they were "born too late for the old and too early for the new faith."
Arthur Zajonc, in S. Daloz-Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*. (p.197-8).

"Trying to understand our twenty-something son or daughter is much like immigrating to a strange country. We neither know our children's language nor their customs."
Distraught parent

"They are like the immigrants who came as pioneers to a new land, lacking all knowledge of what demands the new conditions of life would make upon them." (p. 72).
"They are like unborn child[ren] already conceived but still in the womb." (p. 88).
Margaret Mead: *Culture and Commitment*

For the past year, **Dr. Harry Van Belle**, emeritus professor of psychology at The Kings University College in Edmonton, Alberta, has been researching (thinking about, reading about, studying and interviewing) the lives of emerging adults (young people 18-30). These twenty-something young people appear to be living in a historically new phase of the lifespan between adolescence and adulthood. This means that they generally take about a decade longer than the previous generation to move from the turbulent teenage years to a settled adult life.

Harry has put some of what he has learned in a blog containing a series of seventeen posts. Each post features what he believes to be a salient characteristic of emerging adulthood. Two of his posts are described below by way of illustration. If you are interested in learning more about this, please visit http://emergingyoungadults.blogspot.com/.

Harry welcomes your responses to his blog and invites you to send your comments to him at: harryvanbelle@hotmail.com or on the blog itself. Harry's research is ongoing, and for that he urgently needs the continued input of young people age 18-30. So, if you are in that age bracket, please consider completing the survey featured in post 17 of Harry's blog and send it to him as an attachment to your email. It goes without saying that your responses to the survey will be treated with complete confidentiality.

Post 4. Homeless

Young people usually leave home at the start of their twenties. In that sense they become homeless, i.e. cut off from the place in which they were born and not settled in the place in which they will spend their future. But there is another, perhaps even more profound sense in which they become homeless. In our culture they are considered to be adults at 21. No one will tell them any longer what to do, when to get up, what to eat, how to keep house or what to live for. They can be single, married, cohabit, go to school or not, live anywhere in the world and believe, doubt or question anything they want. They are given much freedom of choice, and little is expected of them except that they make their life choices on their own.

In addition, today's emerging adults are faced with an overwhelming overload of choice. To give just one example, they have over 800,000 possible careers to choose from. That can make deciding on a life's vocation a daunting task. Making decisions in the other areas of their life like whom to marry, where to live or what philosophy of life to commit themselves to is no easier for them in today's world.

With all the privileges they enjoy these young people frequently express feeling a deep sense of existential loneliness. In the absence of mentors helping them find their way, they are often at a loss what to do or where to turn. They experience the world as an unpredictable, foreign place in which they do not feel at home and it is hard for them to make up their individual minds.

What young people experience most today is a dearth of ends rather than means. They are smart enough to get from A to B, provided that they would know why they should go there. They often lack a vision for the future, and no one is inspiring them. "I wish that someone would tell me how to live my life," one emerging adult exclaimed recently. "I would like to be a fish in a fish bowl: open to the world outside, but safe in the water, protected by the bowl."

We live in a world where there is a plurality of vision. Truth has become a matter of opinion, of how you look at it. What's true for me may not be true for you. In a world in which there is an absence of indubitable facts and of overriding values it is easy to feel homeless.

Post 9. Crafting an interpersonal faith inside a plurality of vision

Globalization has made today's world increasingly into a single place where we are all exposed to a wide variety of worldviews, cultures, ideologies and religions. In such a world all ideologies, religions and cultures tend to become relativized. Nothing is true no-matter-what anymore. More and more we are faced with the fact that there is more than one kind of normal in the world. The otherness of others is in our face all the time. In such a world it is hard to escape the notion that we all make our philosophy of life or our religion what it is, that what we believe is strictly up to us and that there is no longer any overarching system of truth out there to appeal to.

Emerging adults are keenly aware of this situation. Rather than search for a worldview that we can all share, the thing that concerns them most is the quality of their character. What counts for them is the ability to make their own choices and to live by them, the willingness to take responsibility for themselves and the commitment to live honest and authentic lives. They have by and large exchanged the certainty of knowing for the integrity of questioning. They have come to believe what they believe without the pretension that what they believe is the only truth. They show respect for the fact that others may have a faith that differs from theirs. They develop an ultra-tolerant interpersonal faith, which says that whatever you believe, above all it must not hurt others or make them feel put down. The faith they do profess to have is a kind of open spirituality in which they pick and choose what to believe. What to live out of and what to live for are private, individual matters. In the words of one emerging adult, they have become a congregation of one.

Post 11. Emerging adults and their parents

Parents of emerging adults find the views and behaviour of their children more than a bit puzzling and quite different from their lives when they were growing up. "Trying to understand our twenty-something son or daughter," they might say, "is much like immigrating to a strange country. We neither know our children's language nor their customs." On the surface there seems to be a disconnect between the previous generation and the current one.

Yet the relationship between today's emerging adults and their parents is surprisingly close and relatively free from conflict. There is much that these children admire about the lifestyle of their parents, such as their work ethic and their willingness to sacrifice. Their parents also continue to support them financially during their twenties, especially when they cannot fully pay their own way because they are still in school.

At the same time, many parents have concerns about their emerging adult children. They want to know whether their children will adopt their values and their lifestyle, accept their worldview, follow in their footsteps and especially when this is going to happen, if ever. In view of the slow pace of emerging adulthood they are impatiently hoping for their sons or daughters to grow up soon and to become like them. Beyond that, it is troubling for many parents to watch their children's lives go in a direction that is quite different from their own. However, it appears that most parents keep these worries to themselves and that they generally give their children a great deal of latitude in shaping their own destiny.

In assessing the validity of the concerns these parents have about their semi-adult children, it should be borne in mind that descriptions by one generation of another generation are of necessity always self-involved. The concerns parents have about their emerging adult children are not just based on an objective view of their children's lives. Those concerns are in part determined by the way these parents experience their own lives.

As for the way today's emerging adults view their parents, they may disagree with elements in their parents' lifestyle, but most of them see no need to openly voice their criticisms. They are generally quite tolerant of the difference in outlook on life between them and their parents, and they largely have chosen to just quietly go their own way. All this entails, however, that there is very little dialogue between today's emerging adults and their parents about life's most fundamental issues, and this in turn adds to the homelessness these twenty-something young people feel.

Columns

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

From captivity to community

I just attended a conference in Wisconsin called Exodus International Regional Conference. It was a great time to connect with people who have been impacted in some way with same gender attraction. Some people came because of a spouse struggling with gender identity; some came to understand their friends or relatives who identify as gay. Most of the people who graced the conference, however, struggle themselves with same gender attraction. They have realized that fixing themselves is impossible, but they are desperate to find healing and understanding of why they struggle. In that desperation they long to find a safe community.

On Sunday, people shared how the weekend had impacted them. A few people said they were scared to come. "What if I am attracted to someone?" "What happens if someone finds me attractive?" One man stood up and said, "It's like saying to an alcoholic, to find your healing you need to go to a bar and be faced with your temptation." Yet that is the very thing that someone who has a disconnect with his gender needs to do. When you struggle with same gender attraction, often you feel that you need to get away from that which tempts you – your own gender. Yet that is the place you find your greatest healing. These men and women faced real fear to come to the conference in search of an accepting community.

I heard heart-wrenching stories that weekend. Many who struggle with same gender attraction have been rejected within their church communities because people are worried about inappropriate attraction. Men and women who struggle with same gender attraction are often tempted by their own genders, but those relationships are also the place where they find the greatest healing.

A safe place to heal

In my own journey out of the gay paradigm, I realized that in order to heal I had to be known and know other men in healthy ways. I couldn't allow my fear to dictate how I related to them. I had to step out into an unknown place, first with an utter dependence on God, my source of strength. Without that, I had no foundation. I had to have men who took the risk to be my friend. Who shared their own journey into manhood and their own struggles, allowing me to see that I am not as "different" as I had always assumed I was. I needed men to give me physical touch. To be unafraid to offer a hug, to embrace me as a brother, pure, healthy and whole. When I left the gay identity, I was walking away from a lot of physical touch. Physical touch that I needed – and it is a legitimate need – but it was found in unhealthy ways and outside the boundary lines of God's intent for me.

I am always encouraged as I attend conferences such as this where people know their need, face their fears and know that they are in a safe community. Sadly, this is often not found in their own communities of faith. More often, they feel pressure to be something they are not. To hide their struggle. This goes even beyond someone who struggles with their gender, but also with parents who have gay or lesbian children, or spouses of those who struggle. They fear what people with think or say about them. They fear judgement on who they are. This keeps them bound in secret and held captive by the enemy.

We all need each other. We need authentic, safe places to walk out our healing and face every issue that life may spring on us. If we don't find that authentic community within the Body of Christ, we will find it outside of that. We will find that in the arms of culture who will embrace our false identities, who will validate our anger, our unforgiveness, and our own ways of getting our needs met. May God give us the strength to rise up and take our place as safe and honest healing communities.

Kenny Warkentin (kenny@livingwaterscanada.org) is an avid blogger, thinker and artist.

Everyday Christian
Cathy Smith

I am a prodigal daughter. This is my true story.

I was eighteen when I left home. Dad and Mom were attending the fair that Saturday. Mom was manning the evangelism booth, handing out tracts. I gloated in the irony of my mom seeking converts while I turned my back on her faith.

I was tired of arguing with my parents about my boyfriend Mark. I wanted independence. I was an adult.

I loaded my friend Monica's [not her real name] car with my meagre possessions – clothes, record player, books. My sister Edith-Ann cried as I packed up. She would be the one to break the news to my parents. I didn't see what a cowardly act that was for someone who was an "adult."

I was looking forward to enjoying the same freedoms as Monica. She could go to school dances and date anyone she wanted. We drove deep into the rural outback and finally arrived at a rundown farmhouse, half-hidden by untended lilac bushes. It shook my courage. I had pictured a lovely split-level with manicured landscaping.

Monica's mom was not quite what I had imagined, either. Monica was petite and vivacious, but her mom was old. She had a huge formless shape wrapped in an apron. She welcomed me with a gentle toothless smile.

Monica's stepdad was scarier. He grunted at me once, and never spoke to me again. His shirt was always unbuttoned, revealing long grey chest hair, and matching hair streamed from his nose and ears. An amputee, he stomped through the house on one leg, rocked in his rocker and read farm papers. I was completely repulsed.

"Prodigal Daughter" (2005) is oil on canvas by contemporary British artist Charles Mackesy.

The bathroom was another surprise. The water there contained sulphur deposits, so the sink, tub and toilet were coated with brown stains. The wallpaper was peeling and the carpet was matted.

Is this it?

My first night revealed the depth of my culture shock. The bedroom was sparsely furnished, with linoleum laid loosely on plank flooring and cut to fit around a stovepipe. A burlap bag served as a curtain. I slept fitfully and awoke to scratching sounds that made my heart pound. Mice? I lay trembling. Finally, the noises compelled me to fly across the hall. Monica laughed at my panic and explained that sometimes birds got caught in the stovepipe. That did not make me sleep any easier.

I landed a Saturday job at the Golf and Curling Club to pay my room and board. I made soup, buttered mounds of bread and served coffee and dessert to the curlers. Then I cleaned up. It was a long, busy day.

Sunday was homework day, since I no longer had to attend church. My English paper was on Sartre's *No Exit*. I immersed myself in existentialist philosophy, convinced that I was creating my own reality by taking on the responsibility of choices. I told myself that existentialism was far more honest than the medieval Christianity my parents espoused where someone else told you how to live your life.

I called home every Sunday. My mom could only talk for a few minutes before breaking down. It became more excruciating to call with each passing week. My brother Fred delivered a letter to me at school that she had written. In her cramped handwriting, she spelled out her love for me. It made me cry in the third floor girls' washroom. But I was stubborn. I would not have rules. I would not go home.

I once was lost

As Christmas approached, my resolve weakened. I couldn't stay any longer in that drafty farmhouse where they never conversed during a meal and ate strange foods like chicken dumplings and spaghetti. I had my freedom, but I was miserable. I could see Mark whenever I wanted, but it wasn't enough to fill up the empty spaces. I wanted the coziness of my own family, and a clean bathroom. Could I come home? I asked. Could I continue dating Mark? Although I mustered up scant remorse, my parents graciously agreed.

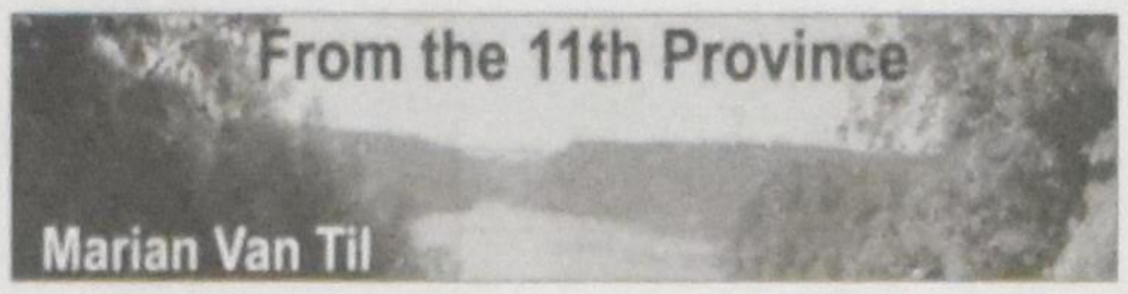
Things were different when I went home. It was strained. There was a distance that took years to bridge. In a few months I went away to university. Much later, I began to comprehend the agony my parents endured. Someone had suggested to my mom that maybe I had moved out to have an abortion. That thought tormented her for months before she dared ask me. I assured her that was not true and was outraged at the rumour. But looking back at my rebellion, I'm not surprised now that someone might have hit upon that idea.

There is more to this tale, but let's fast-forward and reflect on my true-life parable. I'm forgiven. God forgave me. My parents forgave me. My community forgave me. I've even forgiven myself. My selfish, individualistic spirit has been reborn. I'm no longer a prodigal. Today I'm part of a Christian community. I go to church. I sing in a choir. I'm asked to pray at meetings. It's a miracle. It's a party. The water's turned to wine, the rags exchanged for a ball gown.

And now I understand other parables. I'm the lost lamb the shepherd sought. I'm the coin the housewife searched for so persistently. I'm the worker who came at the end of the day, only did an hour's worth of work, and received full pay. Sartre was wrong. There is an exit. "I am the door: whoever enters through me will be saved." Hallelujah.

Cathy Smith (cathy-smith001@hotmail.com) is a contributing editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ontario.

Colulmns



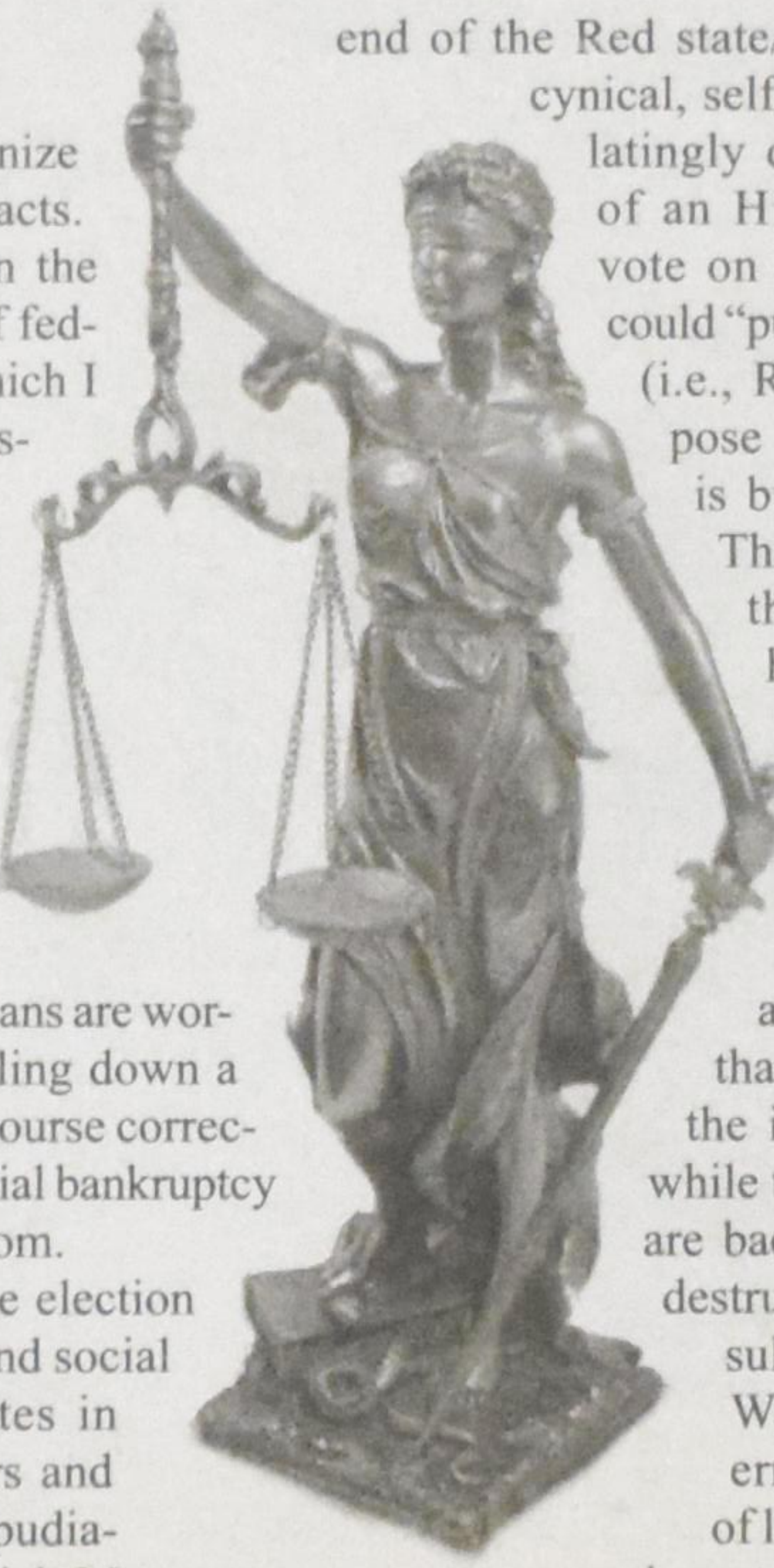
'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord'

I love the country of my birth – the United States – and in which God again placed me in 1990 after a long hiatus in Canada. I've been a political junky ever since I was old enough to know what was going on in the world.

At the same time I was fortunate to have spent 17 years in the True North and 10 more years continuing to work in Ontario after returning to live in the U.S. I was only 21 when I moved to Canada and my time in Ontario was formative. I developed friendships that I will cherish for the rest of my life. But love of homeland runs deep, the more so when it mingles with profound gratitude to God for the freedoms that enable living out one's faith and calling as his child in that land, unmolested (though "unmolested" is no longer always so). I follow politics with both avid interest and acute concern. I fear for my country; for any country whose people – and leaders, far more so – make a god of themselves, their name and their power.

In the last decade it has become clear that the national Democratic Party whose candidates I usually voted for has moved to a leftward extremism that has ever less use for any faith (except their own) that impinges on public life. So I became what New York calls a "non-affiliated voter" – one of those independents upon whom the fortunes of Democrats, Republicans (and Tea Partiers) hang. And I am deeply thankful for the results of the recent mid-term elections here. Why it that?

Lady Justice loses her blindfold



Being Reformed, I recognize worldviews behind political acts. The worldview dominant in the White House and in much of federal politics is not one to which I as a biblical Christian can assent, despite the progressive-Democratic self-diagnosis of standing for economic and social justice for the underdog. I don't buy it. Evidence shows that much of the Obama federal government's justice is anything but blind (impartial). More than three-quarters of Americans are worried that our country is hurtling down a deadly track that, without a course correction, will end in fiscal and social bankruptcy and substantial loss of freedom.

There is no doubt that the election of more than 60 new fiscal and social conservatives and moderates in the House, six new Senators and numerous governors is a repudiation of the course down which Mr. Obama has pushed the country with lightning speed. Understandably, he doesn't want to believe that he grossly misinterpreted the "mandate" he received when elected President. (Nor do much of the supposedly impartial press.)

Rather, the man who promised "hope and change," "post-racial" politics and the end of the Red state/Blue state divide is cynical, self-obsessed and calculatingly devisive. His urging of an Hispanic audience to vote on Nov. 2 so that they could "punish [their] enemies" (i.e., Republicans who oppose *illegal* immigration) is but a recent example. The tactics used to get the highly unpopular healthcare "reforms" passed were despicable, not to mention the repetition of straight-faced lies about what is and is not actually in that massive bill. Nor is the irony lost on us that while the nations of Europe are backing away from the destructive, enervating results of their post-World War II decades of government control of all of life, our own president is systematically embracing that course.

President Obama's philosophical-political attitudes were shaped in the 1960s by both the anti-colonial socialism of his father and (ironically) the radical anti-Americanism of his academic friends. That the President of the United States should often seem to not much *like* the United States he was elected to govern (and that he makes decisions accordingly) is both baffling and troubling to much of the population.

Barely a fifth of Americans see themselves in Obama's left corner. The main problem with that corner is that – Obama's purported "personal faith" aside – there is scant room for God in it, and in fact most of its inhabitants are atheists, philosophically, practically or both. That is not true of most Americans, however, and that offers hope. A striking number of the newly elected public servants are evangelical Christians or Catholics. Will that make a difference? I pray it will. (A notable number of them are also members of minorities: black, Hispanic, Cuban, Indian, and many women – not a reality that critics on the left associate with the "racist" Republican Party.)

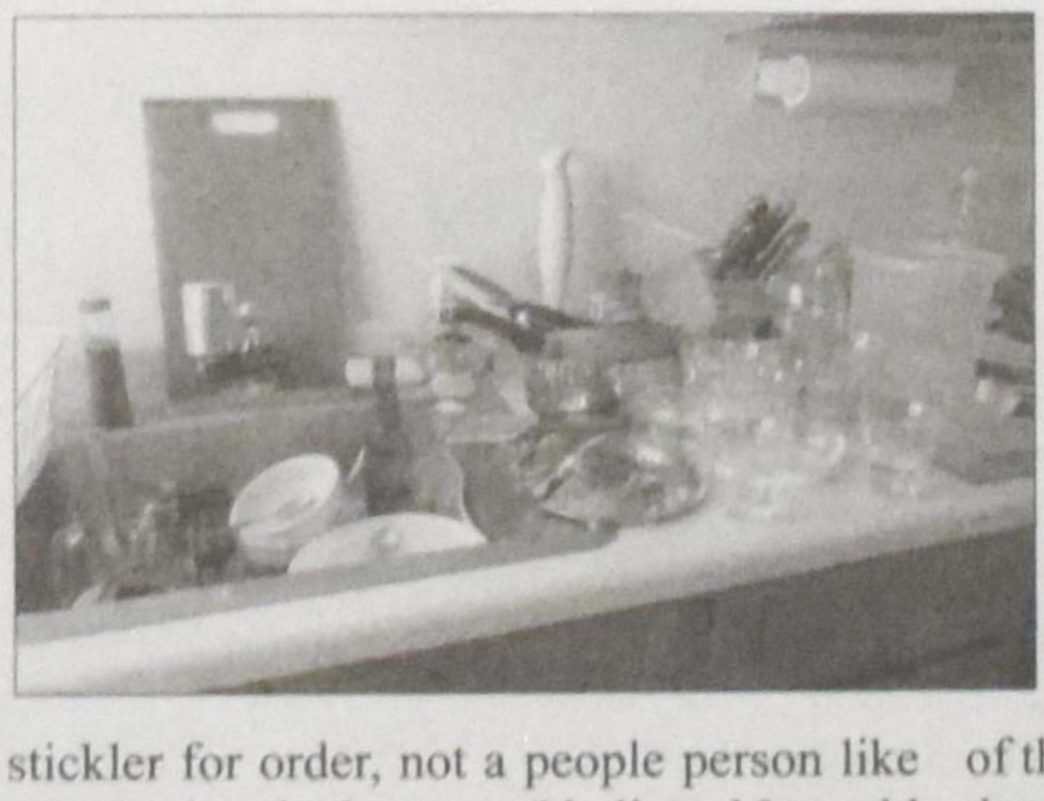
Despite the hammering home of the "fact" that there must be a vast chasm between church and state (our Constitution doesn't say that), interpreted to mean that faith has no place in the public-political square, millions of Americans still realize that "blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." And so we will continue to pray for a revival, on *all* levels.

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, NY.

Getting Unstuck
Arlene Van Hove

How to handle unmanageable housework

There are many distractions in our modern world and staying committed to living a healthy and meaningful adult life takes discipline and self-control. And while we may have no control over some of the illnesses we contract, we can have control over the disease of procrastination. This disease not only robs us of our self worth; it also affects our relationships and family life.



Q. I am 35, married and raising four children (ages six, eight, ten and twelve), all in school. I enjoy most aspects of my life, but I am having trouble getting all my tasks done during the day. It is a major source of frustration. Every morning, I make a list of tasks I need to do in order of priority, by evening much of it remains undone.

Lately, my inability to meet my responsibilities has become an issue in my relationship with my husband. We have an agreement about what we are individually responsible for and he believes I am not doing my share. I am not working outside the home; however, I would love to do so one day but doubt whether I am able to manage more responsibilities. My spouse is a stickler for order, not a people person like me. During the last year I believed I would have more time to become organized when the youngest child went to school, but the problem remains.

A. You are in a new stage of life so I commend you for wanting to look at yourself and make some necessary changes in how you manage your home. You have just come from a long stretch of having young children at home and "getting nothing done," because their needs were a priority. Along the way you probably coped by putting things on the back burner, which has, over time, developed into a habit. Furthermore, you have become so used to interruptions you lost the ability to focus on the tasks at hand. Now, however, you need to shift gears.

My first suggestion is for you to keep a detailed time journal of how you spend your day and do this for a whole week. When you have a clearer picture of what you are doing with your time, you can decide what you may need to do differently. You also state at the end of the day you still have many tasks left undone. Consequently, I believe you may feel overwhelmed, a feeling that can paralyze you and make it harder for you to get started towards a more orderly home environment.

My second suggestion is to list the tasks that need doing by breaking them down into smaller items. Commit yourself to doing a fair chunk of them daily within a specific time frame. It sounds like there are tasks you do not feel like doing but need to be done in order to obtain your goal of an orderly adult life. Just keep at it.

Third, pay attention to your feelings as you begin to make progress. You will feel more satisfied about your day, your ongoing plan, and especially about yourself. Somehow God created us with a need for order in our lives while being aware we do not have to strive for perfection. It could also help to be accountable to a supportive friend.

My fourth suggestion concerns your comment about your spouse being orderly and not a people person. This might mean you spend time with friends or family that could be better spent doing the necessary chores. I would suggest you take a good look at this possible blind spot and cut back until your home environment is more manageable and you no longer have the feeling of being overwhelmed.

If you work at all of the above for two months and you still feel overwhelmed, you may need a new agreement in terms of the division of labour with your spouse.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Columns

Co-owning the Earth

Bert Hielema

Know God, love creation

Build houses and plant gardens and eat what they produce . . . . Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile.
Pray to the Lord for it, for if it prospers, you too will prosper. Jeremiah 29:5 &7
You would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed. Jeremiah 51:9

Prophet Jeremiah *by Marc Chagall, 1968*

Here's something we really don't expect from Jeremiah: a positive statement. "When in Babylon build houses, plant gardens, make the city prosper."

Cities in those days were different from ours; people were quite self-sufficient, with room to grow food. We know Nineveh was similar, because God asks Jonah, "Should I not be concerned about that great city where so many people live and many cattle as well?"

Today the only large American city with space to grow food is Detroit. It has oodles of empty spots, having lost more than half of its population. Want to buy a house cheap? Go to Motor City and get an extra lot thrown into the bargain.

So why did Jeremiah urge the tribe of Judah to blend in? Simple. God wanted his chosen people to stay in good condition physically and materially, and to take time to treasure their religious heritage. As a result much of the Hebrew Bible – the Old Testament – came into being during that 70 year exile. Apparently absence from Jerusalem made the heart grow fonder, made them appreciate God's hand in history, and also made them realize that they did not belong in the city of Babylon.

We also live in Babylon. David, at the end of his reign, acknowledged that we are "aliens and transients." Walter Lippmann, the well-known American commentator, wrote "Every one of us is, from a spiritual point of view, an immigrant." Jesus emphasizes that, "My kingdom is not of this world."

Past the point of no return

Being immigrants means that we may not subscribe to the world's philosophy of "growth at any cost," just to name one example that does the most harm to our fragile planet. It's not for nothing that Jeremiah is called "the weeping prophet" and best-known for his proverbial Jeremiads, his mournful lamentations. He expresses his sorrow with, "We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed . . . for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the clouds." We are discovering the same about our world: it too is beyond healing. We too must pray for it and work for its wellbeing, yet we see each day more clearly that our planet cannot be healed.

Easter Island offers a useful comparison, as Jared Diamond writes in *Collapse*. That island needed trees for its survival, but, just as we do all the time, they kept on cutting them down. Dr Diamond writes "What did the Easter Islander who cut down the last palm tree say while he was doing it? Like modern loggers, did he shout 'Jobs, not trees?' Or 'Technology will solve our problems, never fear, we'll find a substitute for our wood?'"

We are all Easter Islanders now. God's world is choking, which means that God's Word is choking, because God's world is also God's Word, if we believe Article Two of the Belgic Confession. To understand *The Means by Which We Know God*, it states that we know him "first by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:20. 'All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse.'"

To me this suggests that those who recognize God's greatness in creation and glorify his name because of it, and do everything to preserve it, stand justified.

The Belgic Confession places the Bible as a secondary source for knowing God, yet almost all churches see that as the exclusive way to discover him. We speak of the Bible as his holy and divine Word, but I have never heard that the universe is his holy and divine Word. Dietrich Bonhoeffer states that those who deny that God, earth and humanity are intimately linked are engaged in pious secularism.

It is high time that we reset our priorities: make God's universe the primary Word while using the Bible as "a lamp for our feet and a light for our path" (Psalm 119:105). The Christian Church needs an *AGGIORNAMENTO:* an act of bringing it up to date to reflect current conditions.

The Hielema couple lives mostly in Tweed, but often visits Ancaster where they attend a Christian Reformed Church.

November Wind

His birth is in the wind tonight
I can hear or see but almost feel
His cradling hay
I wonder at this fatalism
That he was born
In a wooden box
And I think that I am being passed over
By the rippling echoes
Of what happened that night
Still vibrant in this broad pond of time
The wind chimes
The metal hooks on the barren flagpole
Into an atonal host of heaven
Somehow
It says something of an
Incarnation
had almost forgotten
Beneath the skin
I painted
On the wooden angel
His wings were hollow
For $1.30 at the craft store
They don't fill them with the glory
That costs a son
Listening to this wind tonight
I can feel his wings
Buoyed over a middle eastern landscape
So different from what we've made it
And I wonder if I painted
The curving line of his mouth
The wrong direction

Brett Alan Dewing

Advent

The day when God became common clay
there was no getting around it of course
that God was greatly in love with us:

angels were singing celestially –
which trumpets had never noted before
sending the message of love to our heart's door

well-registered and wrapped up earnestly
(though the world receives it so meagrely)
but in the stall souls continue to pray.

The shepherds were amazed that evening when
the heavenly choir shone in the night sky
greeting them divinely from on high

mesmerizing the sheep and the men.
How would we react to such a choir
suddenly serenading our evening fire?

Frank Sawyer

(Ceramic work by a well-known Hungarian artist, Margit Kovas 1902-1977)

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Classifieds

90th Birthday

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This is his testimony as we celebrate his **90th Birthday**:

"Great was, and is, His faithfulness.
Beyond expectation did He bless
Us, undeserved. He did show
The way that we till now could go.
Then there is the promise of eternal rest;
And with that in sight, I am truly blessed!"

Anniversaries

CELEBRATING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS
1955 December 9 2010

William and Margaret Colyn (née **Knegt**)

are celebrating their **55th Wedding Anniversary**.

We, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, thank and honour them for their years of faithfulness to each other and our Lord.

Joe & Joanne Colyn; Justin & Andrea, Jonathan, Rachel; Chris & Lisa, Caris; Lauren & Ryan Jensen, Levi; Erika • Margaret & Theo Hoekstra, Darrell, Katrina, Rosanne, Joshua, Harrison, Grant • James Colyn • Anita & Ron Prange, Luke, Jill • Dorothy & Rudy VanAmelsvoort, Jason, Lindsay, Cameron • Sylvia & Isaac Van-Geest, Isaac John, Greg, Michael • David & Alyanne Colyn, Willem•

New address: 113 - 4320 Lincoln Ave S, Beamsville ON LOR 1B0
New phone: 289-566-8621 New email: wcolyn@cogeco.ca

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. Jeremiah 17:7

LIndsay 1960 November 12 Campbellford 2010

Speak, for your servant is listening. 1 Samuel 3:10

With thanksgiving to God for his faithfulness, we rejoice with our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents:

Elzo and Rina Eisinga (nee **Marcus**)

on the occasion of their **50th Wedding Anniversary**

With lots of love from all of us:
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Elizabeth and Don vanEs – Ben, Robyn
Wilhelmina & Dave Hoekstra
Jeremy & Reanne – Ian
Christine & Kyle – Charlotte, Owen, Delilah
Lisa

Home address: 195 Victoria Street
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Obituary

On October 23, 2010 in her 98th year the Lord took home his child

Pauline deKok

Beloved wife of the late John deKok.
Loving mother of
Jack and Mary deKok,
Herb and Jane deKok,
Rene and Dorothy deKok,
Johanna Matthews, and
Mary and Herman Vander Munnik.
Cherished grandma to 17 grandchildren & many great-grandchildren.

But if we walk in the light, as he is the light we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 1 John 1:7
– John and Pauline's wedding verse.

Thank you to all who have supported and cared for her, especially the staff at Holland Christian Homes, Faith Manor second floor.

A memorial service was held at Holland Christian Homes, on Tuesday October 26, 2010.

Contact: Rene DeKok
175 Seminole Road
Ancaster L9G 1Y7

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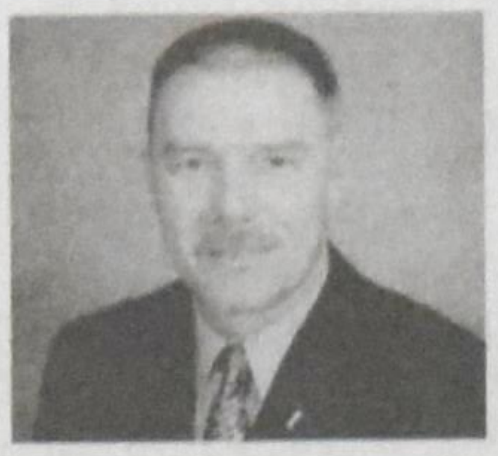

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Principal

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We are seeking a leader with a commitment to Jesus Christ for an interdenominational K to 6 school with an enrolment of approximately 230 students, beginning August 2011.

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Corny VanDasselaar - Search Committee Chair
802-6th Avenue North
Lethbridge, AB T1H 0S1

Phone: (403) 328-6380 – Fax: (403) 327-6333
Email: PrincipalSearch@ImmanuelCS.ca

Deadline for Applications is December 15, 2010

Immanuel Christian School Aylmer
Instruction for Christian Service

PRINCIPAL – August 2011

Immanuel Christian School (ICS), located in Aylmer, Ontario, is a covenanting rural community which recognizes that God's sovereignty extends to all areas of life. The Society is seeking an enthusiastic administrator/teacher with strong leadership abilities, vision, and a passion for Christian education.

Candidates must be committed to a Reformed worldview as outlined in the constitutional Principle Guidelines for Christian education which can be found at www.immanuelchristianschool.net.

Applications will be accepted until January 15, 2011.

For further information contact:
Grace Schipper, Secretary of Principal Search Committee
53777 Talbot Line, RR 1, EDEN, Ontario N0J 1H0
Phone: 519-866-3731 Email: hschipper@amtelecom.net

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A job description is available upon request. Please send a letter of application, a complete resume, two reference letters, as well as a brief outline of a personal vision for campus ministry to

Dr. Ted Binnema, Chair of the Search Committee,
4642 Newglen Place
Prince George, BC, Canada, V2K 4K1
binnemat@unbc.ca.

UNBC

Applications submitted before 15 December 2010 are guaranteed consideration.

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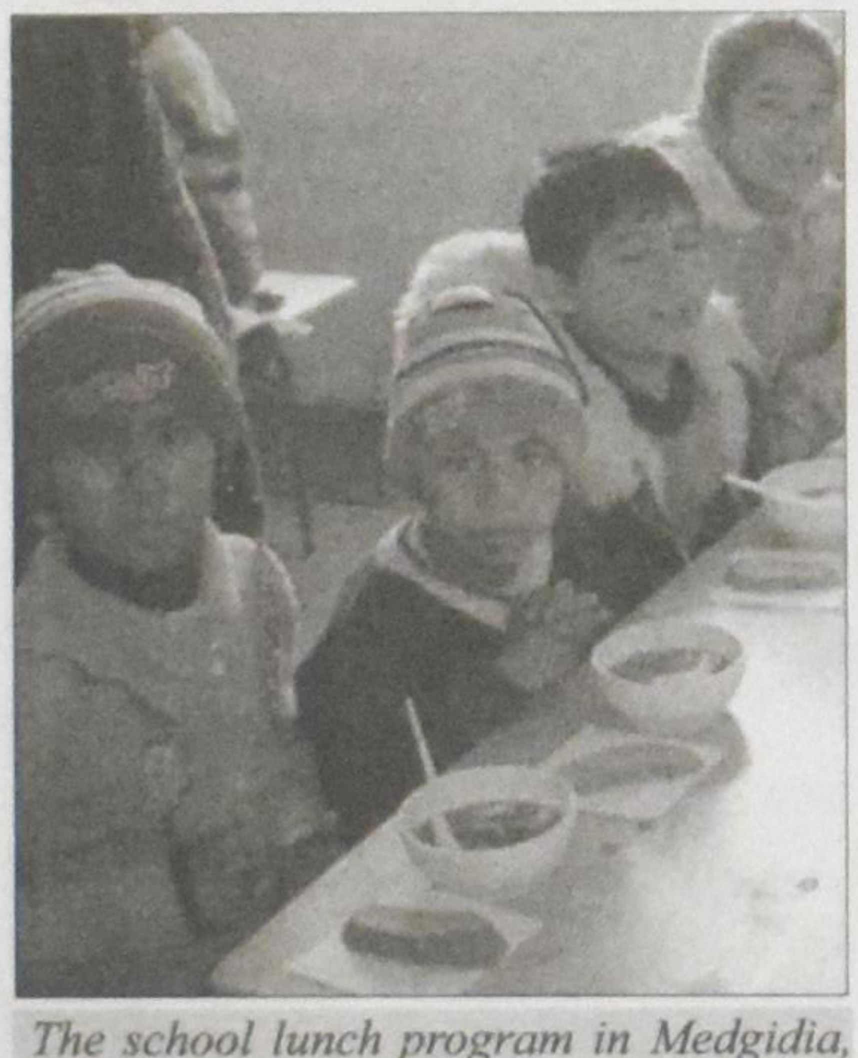
Eurovangelism's Gift Guide – a thankful response

As Christmas approaches, we realize just how blessed we are in North America. Most of us lack nothing. We live in a warm house or apartment , we are able to dress suitably for the seasons, our homes are filled with comfortable furniture and our cupboards are well stocked.



The school lunch program in Medgidia, Romania. Children are having soup made from the dehydrated soup mix from Ontario Christian Gleaners in Cambridge, Ont.

Eurovangelism's Gift Guide, which appears in this issue, is an acknowledgment that we are truly blessed by God. The Gift Guide was first brought to Canada by Brian Lise when he worked with Partners International in 1996 and then adopted by Eurovangelism in 2006. World Vision picked up on the idea in 1997. The Gift Guide is not designed as a wish list for what we want for Christmas. No, it's a catalogue filled with life-giving gift ideas that we can give to men, women and children across Eastern Europe.

Each of the 23 gift ideas come as a result of personal contact by Eurovangelism staff and those taking part on vision trips with families and individuals in countries such as Moldovia, Romania, Russia, Albania and Bulgaria.

Over the years we have seen entire families sit down at dining room tables to prepare a Christmas wish list of items which they want to buy to help transform the lives of boys, girls and families half a world away. That deliberate exercise is not done out of guilt; it is done out of thankfulness. The Gift Guide is a thankful response to God.

A $5 gift will provide lunches for a child for a week who would otherwise go without. A healthy lunch helps them concentrate on their school work.

Hundreds of children spend their entire days throughout the year without the benefit of a pair of shoes. A $20 gift keeps their feet out of the mud, snow and rain, contributing directly to better health.

A $30 food box provides enough food to feed a family for an entire month. The food is distributed through Harvest for the Hungry.

Eurovangelism is a strong supporter of the Alpha program throughout Eastern Europe. Alpha continues to transform lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. A $40 gift will enable someone to attend a course and learn more about Jesus and what it means to follow him over a shared meal. A $400 gift will bring the course to 10 people.

A $150 gift provides an opportunity for someone to attend a vocational training course run by Eurovangelism partner organizations. Sewing courses, for example, lead to employment which can provide income to feed and clothe a family.

Church planting plays a significant role in spreading God's good news across Eastern Europe. There are teams of qualified and passionate church planters who carry out their ministry with zeal, but who need to rely on donations to survive. A $300 gift will provide one month's salary for a church planter; $3,600 will cover his salary for an entire year.

The Gift Guide also appears on Eurovangelism's website, *www.eurovangelism.ca* , so you can point your friends or far-flung family members to the website where they can make their own selections.

The Canadian dollar goes a long way when invested in the lives of individuals and families in such places as Romania, Moldova or Albania.

Why not bless the lives of those who live half a world away this Christmas. Set aside a few dollars; better yet, invest considerably in these lives ... as your thankful response to God.

Classifieds

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We are now working on our **Christmas issue**. Contact Ineke if you want a colour ad for that issue and give Christmas Greetings. admin@christiancourier.ca or call 905-937-3314.
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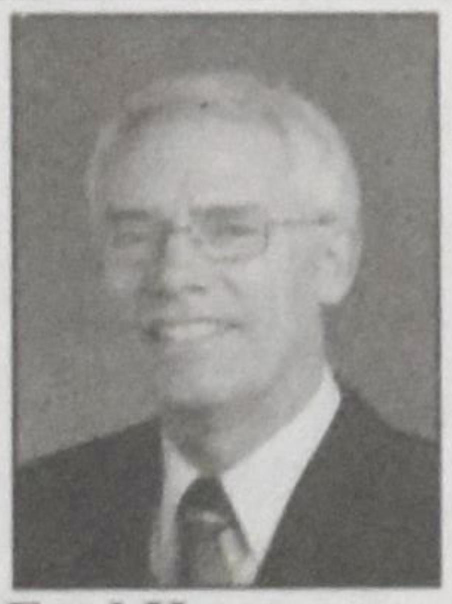

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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Nov 21 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Henry DeBolster will be preaching.

Dec 3 Handel's Messiah concert 7:30 pm, at the Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church, **Jordan**. Email Michael Ziep at mzwiep@ctstv.com for more information.

Dec 5 Dutch Christmas Carol Service at Emmanuel Reformed Church, 170 Clarke St. N,. **Woodstock**, Ont. 7:00 p.m. Rev. Henry DeBolster. Babysitting provided. Refreshments served.

Dec 11 Christmas sing-a-long concert with the Liberation Choir 7 pm. at Redeemer University in **Ancaster**. See ad.

Feb 18-20 Marriage Encounter weekend. **St. Cathrarines, Ont**. Register at www.reformedme.org

Apr 8-10 Marriage Encounter weekend. **London, Ont**. Register at www.reformedme.org

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News

Freeing the slaves in our backyard

Part I of a series on human trafficking in Canada

Emily Wierenga

VANCOUVER, B.C. – Miss British Columbia and Trinity Western University student Tara Teng is an advocate for the victims of human trafficking, the average age of whom is 18-24.

"I feel as though the cry of the slaves found me," says the 22-year-old, who recently traveled to Ottawa to speak both at a national press conference and in a private meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper, urging Canadians to fight for the cause of the enslaved.

"The deeper I went into this issue the more horrified I became," Teng recalls. "Stories of young women sold for $90 – less than my iPod – raped, beaten, abused, starved and sold for sex by the hour then dumped the moment they were 'un-sellable;' men being held in shackles on cocoa plantations in the Ivory Coast of Africa so that we can enjoy our chocolate bars; young boys forced to work in brick factories in India; orphaned children in countries devastated by war or natural disasters that are picked up and under the control of traffickers who were using them for forced labour or forced prostitution . . . ."

Tara Teng urges Christians to lead the fight against slavery.

According to the International Labour Organization, the modern-day slave trade generates more money than Google, Nike and Starbucks combined.

"It's the world's fastest growing illegal industry," says Teng. "We are talking about an entire industry that is profiting off the sale and exploitation of human beings. Once I heard that, I could not walk away."

The Wal-Mart of sex trafficking

Despite being abolished over 200 years ago, slavery is more prevalent today than it's ever been. Defined by the United Nations as "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of force or other forms of coercion," human trafficking is the second largest organized crime worldwide, surpassed only by drugs. Exploitation of persons varies from prostitution to forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

And Canada is not exempt. On September 13, the RCMP released a report stating 800 to 1,200 Canadians and immigrants are trafficked nationally each year, while 2,200 men, women and children, are transported into America from Canada on an annual basis for work in brothels, sweatshops, domestic jobs and construction work. Craigslist has been deemed the Wal-Mart of sex trafficking, raking in one third of its revenue, or $36.5 million, from the hourly sale of young girls.

Fighting for freedom

Canada's largest human trafficking case was revealed in early October when 19 men were found locked in a basement of a home in Hamilton, Ontario. They'd been coerced into working for no pay on a construction site, and fed scraps of food. Another recent case in Burnaby, BC, involved a man accused of bringing in girls from Hong Kong and forcing them to work at brothels.

Manitoba's first-ever human trafficking charge was laid September of this year, after an older woman was found to be selling the services of a younger, aboriginal girl who took refuge in the perpetrator's home after living in various shelters. And yet, in the same month, Ontario's Supreme Court ruled in favour of fully decriminalizing prostitution. "The ruling is a gift to pimps and traffickers and only serves to protect the security and safety of men buying women and girls," states REED (Resist Exploitation, Embrace Dignity). BC is threatening to follow suit.

Joy Smith, Member of Parliament for Kildonan-St.Paul is someone who, alongside faith-based groups such as REED and International Justice Ministries Canada (IJM), is devoted to advocating for those enslaved.

"Traffickers need to know that Canada will not accept the exploitation and sale of our children and any attempts to do so will be met with stiff consequences," says the MP who introduced Bill C-268, an amendment to Canada's Criminal Code to introduce a new human trafficking offence specifically addressing child traffickers. This June, the bill passed its Third Reading and was sent to the Governor General of Canada for Royal Assent.

"The strong support for Bill C-268 reveals a clear indication that the majority of Parliamentarians understand the necessity of ensuring the traffickers of minors receive sentences that reflect the severity of this grave offence," states Smith.

Next March, churches in the Vancouver Area have the opportunity to fight for those enslaved through Freedom Week, a campaign organized by Teng for NGOs and Greater Vancouver residents. Occurring March 6-13, "The purpose of the week is to raise awareness for the general public to learn about the issue of modern day slavery through various events," says Teng, who's arranged for a press conference with politicians, benefit concerts, an art and dance show, as well as a freedom march, among others.

Whether it's through Freedom Week or some other means, Teng says believers have a responsibility to lend a voice to those that have none. "As Christians, we have been called by God to fight for the freedom of his people," she says. "We should be leading the fight against slavery!"

Calling herself a 'modern-day abolitionist', Miss BC refuses to stand still – and she urges others to stand with her in the fight against slavery. "I have dedicated ... my life to advocating for the rights of others and speaking out as a voice for truth, justice, freedom and mercy worldwide," she declares.

"I will not be silent. I may be young, but I am passionate and I am carrying the cry of slaves to the world so that freedom may be fulfilled for all people."

Emily Wierenga (www.emilywierenga.com) is an author, artist and freelance writer who lives with her husband and son in Neerlandia, AB.

In **Part II** of this series, policy analyst Julia Beazley will focus on prostitution in Canada (forthcoming December 13).

Elim Investment Opportunities

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